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(Con)textual Strategies: Understanding and Interpretation

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Charles Altieri

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Introduction

TON KRUSE

The late founding editor of the *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics*, Prof. Ananta Charan Sukla, thought of doing an issue on ‘textual strategies for understanding and interpretation’ way back in the eighties. At that time the philosophical movement of *Structuralism* was popular and had led to a more integral approach of understanding and interpretation in hermeneutic studies. The meaning of texts and other cultural artefacts was now explicitly approached in relation to their context(s), instead of being treated as autonomous, moreover, a-historical artefacts. Based on insights of Ferdinand de Saussure, structuralist approaches stepped away from a dualistic or dichromatic thinking about the sign or the case and its meaning. The *signifier* (the sign or the case) and the *significance* (the meaning) were now not only approached as related in an inextricable manner to one and another, but to their context and their interpreter as well. The grammar shapes the context in which words both receive and give their meaning. In the same manner, any artefact is always approached in and from a specific context, in which it is and becomes meaningful. Structuralist thinking lead to the realisation that language is an integral part of thought (idea, concept, belief) – language and thought are both there ‘at once’ and cannot be disentangled. Language was now understood not as *the medium* of thought, but was revealed as the shape or form of thought. The word and the meaning are both there at once, and cannot be approached separately. Consequently, the relations that are found between the language and the case, the text and its meanings, were seen as *a structure*, where all parts are meaningful of – and where all parts constitute ‘meaning’ or significance in. To be understood, each part of this structure must always be approached from different angles, mapping the rich web of relations that are found internally – but that also reach out externally.

As Paul Ricoeur said it: all saying is always about something. And only because man has language, he can have ‘a world’. (Tekst en Betekenis, Ambo, Baarn, 1991, p. 98/99) A world in contrast to having merely a ‘situation’ – the immediate that appears to us unmediated. *A world* that is made up of everything there is – and of everything that was said and thought about what is there – and that somehow is understood as meaningful. Structuralism has added this fundamental insight: not only what is there is understood, but what is understood is also ‘there’. So, by the way we understand things, the case itself is somehow ‘changed’. It becomes *seen* in that particular light. The understanding is itself part of the structures that interpretation strives to unravel, and all meaning is in that manner construed.

In this special issue, I have aimed to show the rich range of contemporary approaches of understanding strategies and insights that Structuralism has developed into today. Scholars and artists from different countries have contributed to it, all of whom I am very grateful to. To honour the great work that Sukla did with his long-running and influential Journal, and to honour the important work that contributor Prof. Charles Altieri has done for the Arts and Literary Studies, we have included a contribution that Prof. Altieri made for the fifth issue of the Journal in 1982. Unexpectedly, it fits the theme of this special issue exactly and adds relevant insights to what contributors to this issue have found and proposed, as well as that it elaborates on issues that Altieri brings forward in his new contribution to this issue.

Lastly, but not in the least, I would like to thank Basudhara Roy for reading the proofs with me.

R.S.O.L., Deventer, The Netherlands

Can Literary Studies be Restored to What they Once were in the University?

CHARLES ALTIERI

The current parlous situation of the arts and the humanities in most American colleges and universities poses some intricate and interesting problems. On one hand, those who appreciate what education can produce in these fields have to find ways of contesting prevailing attitudes on the part of those who do not share their educational background. On the other hand, those proponents of the arts and humanities have to face the fact that those in control of university resources increasingly think they have to accept the marketplace as an arbiter of competing interests. If one allocates resources in terms of enrollments and degrees, humanistic disciplines are getting exactly what the numbers dictate. Why should idealistic claims about educating the whole person prevail over practical concerns to shorten time in academic pursuits and emphasize skills needed in the marketplace?

Here I can speak only about imaginative writing and the disciplines that constitute the visual arts. I limit myself because I think proponents of education in the arts now have to meet three conditions. First, in literary study at least we have to heed Michael Clune's arguments why current trends of moralizing and politicizing the arts fail to change the situation: they only idealize cognitive goals despite the likelihood that any plausible defense of education in the arts has to articulate competing models of judgment and understanding, ones that are better attuned to essential features of social life and the intricate needs of self-consciousness.¹ Second, resistance to contemporary trends in education has to recuperate the force of the reasons that led universities for centuries to worry not just about numbers but about what valuable interests and practices education might inculcate in students whether or not they know how to participate in what the arts afford. Now it seems bad taste and blind self-interest to make such claims about an education not governed by practical concerns. But there are many ways of being practical—including developing capacities for intricate judgment and passionate appreciation—capacities sustaining values that have been at the center of what liberal education tries to have carry over into adult life.

My third condition involves a more specific obligation on those who want to defend education in the arts. They have to be painfully concrete because they are addressing a mixed audience, many of whom now have not had especially satisfying experiences in aesthetic domains. If there is a new invention in technology, one does not have to understand the process of discovery in order to appreciate and use its results. But the arts are mostly concerned with processes. If one does not know how to experience the mode of inquiry one is left with nothing but boredom. So I begin with boredom as a heuristic: as Alva Noë shows superbly, many well-educated people get bored by serious and much-affirmed works of art.² But while Noë is concerned mostly with resisting this boredom by having people attune to the practices involved in art appreciation, I am primarily interested in what this propensity to boredom tells us about American education and American social life. What do people want or demand that they are not getting from the arts?

I

My answer to my own question is that this boredom stems largely from desiring in aesthetic experience something that the work of art does not provide—like explanations or straightforward descrip-

tions or a movement from premises to conclusions. American education now, like American professional life, is for the most part oriented toward cognitive procedures. The goal of inquiry is to get a sufficiently clear picture of the details that one can test hypothetical generalizations accounting for interrelations among these details and opening paths for further inquiry. Inquirers know how to go from the particular to the general and then use the general as a guide for action. In contrast, most widely respected works of art are not very interesting as either descriptions of states of affairs, or as arguments making judgments about states of affairs. The descriptions are too partial and absorbed in evocations of what seem personal feelings that block objectivity. And the arguments are insufficiently generalized in what seems their painful indirection. Instead of treating details as building blocks to cognitions, the aim of most art is to construct relational fields that thicken the resonances of the particular elements. The arts generalize by developing particulars so they become forceful and exemplary as possible modes of feeling and of thinking.

So how can we formulate what many artists think makes it worth resisting standard cognitive practices in our society. Here I must recuperate arguments that many people think are elitist and formalist. And I do so from a highly privileged position as a white male professor, that generates suspicion – even from me – that I can speak to our political situation. Yet I have to hope even this subject position can profit from these critiques in order to focus on how the arts can influence our approaches to large segments of contemporary experience. For the stakes are higher when we are concerned primarily with university education. Our main task as teachers of literature in the universities is not just to get people to read but to read primarily for why the artistic labors might matter for the kinds of articulation classical and current works can establish for our experiences. So from my perspective it is not sufficient to adapt the pragmatist theory of social value of the arts based on their influence in current discourses developed by Namwalli Serpel. This model just focuses on content in a way that leaves little room for the kind of transformation of habits that I see as the basic goal of literary education. That goal has its own social ambitions that involve seeing how and why artists, current and classic, tend to resist critical discourse emphasizing concerns for knowledge available also in other disciplines. Instead they seek goals involving the intensity, emotional and intellectual depth, and insight carried by the experiencing of the work.

I have for a long time worked with a distinction between “example of” and “example as” in order to distinguish how works of art resist submission to general categories of explanation and yet manage to produce other paths for generalization that depend on achieving distinctive particularity. An “example of” something is an instance of a class. An “example as” something calls attention to a particular that might be significant for the qualities it displays and so worth keeping in memory as possible material for comparisons. Think of the difference between a standard yellow swatch that allows us a color name and a unique shade of yellow that we might think could be useful for touching up an illustration. Now I want to propose a similar distinction between “experience of” and “experience as” in order to bring out the differences in modes of judgment involved in each. These differences in turn involve principles of valuing particular engagements with the world. “Experience of” calls for judgments based on cognitive values: we tend to ask “in what am I engaged” and “how do I understand what the situation involves for my consequent behavior.” “Experience as” is quite different. Here we encounter experiences that present the moment as an invitation to immersing oneself in its qualities.³ We care less about determining the truth about what is happening than participating as fully as possible in what is unfolding before us. Seeking explanation might involve shortchanging possible complexities and intricacies of motive for the agents involved. And that would reduce the possibility of fully appreciating why the particulars of the event prove so engaging.

I make this distinction primarily so that we can honor Wittgenstein’s demonstration of how little in our lives is actually driven by concerns for stable knowledge rather than concerns for elaborating what strikes us as interesting in what we encounter. There is also the additional value of recognizing how important for human lives are qualities that we dwell on as conditions of experience. For we

then are likely to see the point of David Chalmers' arguments about the hard problem for the theory of consciousness—which is simply why do analyses based on the pursuit of information ignore the fact that we do not simply process information but we engage in the experiences that convey this information.

I cannot supplement Chalmers' philosophical arguments. But I can show how this interest in the qualities of experience pervades human life and provides one significant ground for developing an interest in the arts. So, now we need to distinguish between two different and interconnected ways of fleshing out what can become manifest in experience. So far we have focused on what we might call the scenic dimension involved in participating imaginatively in how works of art make present aspects of our world. There is also a purposive dimension—a sense that someone is responsible for the shape and intensity of the qualities that we find engaging. That responsibility can be attributed to any agent who wants to make visible what we might call the stager's hand, as in a love note. But the arts have a particular way of calling attention to all that the act of staging can do. We best focus on how artists perform if we attend to how they produce a doubled world. There is an imagined world to be experienced differently. And there are within the unfolding of this world signs that we are invited to participate not only in the event but in the work of staging or realizing what becomes present. Minds become embodied in manifest material events.

Boredom occurs for people trying to engage art works when they do not know how to look for or assess this doubling. Conversely, demonstrating how to gain access to possible values involved in such doubling is precisely what university education can afford—both in terms of illustrating what to look for and dramatizing the effects of the making. Such affordance then promises to make intelligible an entire domain of imaginative activities, that have been central in the culture and can be central again—if people can learn how to identify with the intelligence responsible, for how works of art come to constitute intensified versions of experiencing distinctive states of sensibility.⁴

I will soon rely on particulars in order to demonstrate the delight and power of imaginative doubling. But first I want to provide two touchstones for the process involved. The first is philosophical. Imagine how we might adapt Wittgenstein's contrast between "Red." and "Red!" "Red." offers a description. "Red!" expresses states like surprise or wonder. What makes this shift in value possible? Perhaps the significance of this contrast is sharpest when we bring in Heidegger's distinction between the "is" of description and the "is" of what he calls "self-blossoming emergence." Second, in order to show how such concerns are central to the experience of art we can follow Paul Cézanne's account of restructuring particulars in order to create a doubled space where imagination becomes "realization." He argues that his pictures are neither descriptive representations of scenes nor personal expressions about feelings those scenes elicit. Rather his ambition is to present "pictures which will be an education" by means of their devotion "entirely to the study of nature" (letter May 12, 1904, ATM, 34). The process of realization involves making visible the deep satisfaction located in activating the care and skill that imagination can bring. For it transforms what is observed into a manifestation of the forces that make it an adventure for the eye. Then the painter produces not only a truth within nature but an activity of giving the artist's "entire personality, whether great or small" (Ibid).⁵ The gift is something close to a wedding between the will needing to affirm its own activity and a world that yields its nature to such activity. Doubling will and world produces a complex and active singularity.

II

Now we need to see concretely how the maker's will and the experience rendered constitute a doubling that weaves the object in the subject and the subject in the object as conditions of experience. And perhaps only then can we have a clear picture of why art is so difficult to teach to audiences limited by a devotion to practical cognition. By stressing imaginative doubling we enable orientations in and to the world, in ways that do not idealize knowing that something is the case but instead rely on knowing how to reflect on, and attend to, what engages our attention.⁶ And we demonstrate the

cost of what Wittgenstein called “aspect blindness,” the narrowing of interest to one practical concern that occludes attention to what we might see displayed in how the phenomenon takes on presence.

My first example comes from Modernist visual art because this work typically emphasized alternatives to any kind of straightforward description serving cognitive ends. Imagine you are encountering at MOMA a canvas by Kasimir Malevich: you see a creamy white background, a rather large black square parallel to the picture frame and in the lower right of the painting a much smaller tilted red square.⁷ The sensual details are blunt and obvious. The shapes are too simple and painfully direct to constitute any kind of decorative design. And there is clearly no overt argument or narrative. So we have to imagine what the maker might convey and embody as reasons for making this presentation. There has to be some other world hovering within the relations among these details. Engaging this painting requires entering the doubled world necessary for understanding why the surface is so plain or, better, so elemental. One way of entering is to ask how both the visible shapes are related to each other and to the creamy off-white background. Notice for example how the background would alter, along with the feelings involved, if the red square were simply beneath the black square without this tilt. When I first spoke about this painting one audience member, the son of a very famous father, answered this question by suggesting that then the father would be suffocating the son. It does not take this level of melodrama to see the tilt as involving some kind of active differing from the authority of the black square. In fact, Malevich said red was the color of revolution. But I want to concentrate on more intimate and more realistic properties of this tilt. Notice that this tilt has an important material effect on the background. For its action stresses the power of differences. And one aspect of that power is that the painting containing the differences then becomes more active—not just a container but now as a comprehensive force capable of setting forth and containing these oppositions.

Then there is the tilt itself. It does suggest the value and power for imagining breaking from oppressive authority. But for me, there is a more important intimate aspect of the tilt, that embodies how subjective interests break from their conventional backgrounds. The painting contains two contrary pulls—toward order and toward the assertion of difference—so that each becomes a more powerful pull on a responding sensibility. Such forces probably even invoke, and exemplify, self-consciousness about Suprematism’s efforts to break from representational painting. And this is not yet the most fundamental power exemplified by this self-consciousness inseparable from an elemental sensuous existence. I now think that this red tilt virtually defines what is involved in being a subject who feels physically and psychologically an involvement in distinctive individual projects. We see in the painting a proleptic effort to locate psychology in the material world rather than in pure inwardness. When we attribute imaginative life to painting, we put ourselves in position to provide a sensuous analogue both for the viewer’s sense of attaining some kind of individuality and the painting’s appreciation of what this tilt has done to the history of art.

I want a second example that is not modern, yet perfectly attuned to how doubling in art can embody elemental but intricate demands on self-consciousness. So I will emphasize the power of a very simple move in William Blake’s “The Sick Rose.” Notice how a simple metrical shift in the sixth and seventh lines give a physical base for the combination of terror and pleasure that the poem asserts. This is no longer mere assertion. The text embodies an action that takes on significance as a feature of what the poem is asserting. And by this metrical shift tone becomes substantially more complex:

O Rose thou art sick.
The invisible worm,
That flies in the night
In the howling storm:

Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy:
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy.

As we ask what kind of information this text provides, please look carefully at how the tone of the speaking invites interpretive speculation. And notice how the text utilizes the physicality of meter as its insistence on a sensuous dimension that remains inseparable from how the imagination is invited to process the experience. The first feature of tone is the surprising fact that there is so little description of this rose. The interest of the speaker clearly lies elsewhere: from the start the poem offers an apostrophe directly addressing the rose rather than maintaining a distance that would allow description. The focus is on feeling, mostly as an effort to identify with the worm's point of view. Clearly there is a sense of horror at this destruction. But there is also another pronounced process of identifying with the worm as it exercises the power of its given nature. Perhaps the best way of summarizing this tone is to see it as an act of chilling admiration—as if beauty had to learn to take pleasure in the destructive forces it inspires. We cannot experience the fullness of this speaking without attending to this disturbing play of appreciation and pleasure in destruction.

The primary role of the meter is to capture and help interpret this complexity of feeling. Most of the poem offers five syllable lines with one anapest and one iamb. But everything changes in the sixth and seventh lines. The sixth line has only four syllables: “of crimson joy” presents a very concise statement of what becomes the worm's target. Then the seventh line has six syllables, suggesting the power of the worm to violate the space of that joy. The added syllable embodies both the worm's force and its expansive self-delight in taking over any possible self-delight for the rose itself. This in turn sets the context for the intense finality of the concluding line “Does thy life destroy.” Here rhythm again doubles the force of assertion because there is sense that each syllable can be stressed. The power of this perverse love here then becomes completely at one with the change in pace of diction and meter. Now the poem turns to a kind of hovering over detail that intensifies the pleasure in this undoing of everything we desire from the rose. Perhaps we have to identify with the worm's pleasure because its power for destruction is likely to prove more enduring than anything beauty can establish: fascination with the worm transforms even the inner life how the speaker formulates the movement of description. This is doubling with a vengeance.

III

There are three basic theoretical dimensions to the concept of doubling—one concerning how it dramatizes basic features of aesthetic experience, one enabling us to characterize what powers the works make available to audiences, and one proposing to treat the powers involved in doubling as potentially substantial social supplements to the modern world's reliance on the kinds of epistemic activity that are valued by those concerned primarily with various market-place conditions.

The primary force of realization depends on the effort to participate imaginatively in what artists and writers are doing with their media. As we have just seen, such works virtually demand keeping our awareness focused on everything that resists offering clear description or argument. Then we can begin to concentrate on what happens to our sensibility as we speculate on why the artists develop specific interrelations based on elements like meter and tone, or contrasting shapes. My second concern follows logically. Our focus on the content of the work is mediated by our focus on these acts of participation. In order to participate fully we virtually have to ask why it might matter to see aspects of the world from the perspective in which we try to participate. Then we can understand why many theorists claim that aesthetic sensibility cultivates significant powers for engaging in social life. We have to hear shifts in tone and adjust our interpretive frameworks for such tones. And we have to attend carefully to the details of another's labors because their interrelationship becomes a crucial dimension of the work's emerging for consciousness. Only then do we fully recognize what being an active member of an audience entails.⁸

This last observation highlights significant social powers that are crucial to education. First our basic aim in reading and in looking is appreciating something we cannot possess but only identify

with in its ways of constituting experience. We have to seek a version of identification for ourselves within the parameters of attending to how the artist proceeds. This identification will involve feeling one's own active capacity for such empathy as a mode of pleasure as well as a significant power to share in how other people construct experience. So empathy typically fuses with this enhanced self-consciousness. In this respect an example from Max Scheler stands out. He offers a contrast between situations where finite resources must be divided, so, that the more people involved, the smaller the individual shares from any material object become – and situations like performances of a symphony, where it is feasible to imagine that the larger the audience, the greater becomes the capacity for joy. Because each individual can identify one's own joy with the joy of others.⁹ And even when the audience is only a person reading, there can be constant awareness that other people are reading the same work with perhaps the same emotional engagements. Of course, emotional responses may also differ. But in the domain of art projecting these possible differences can also be a useful, probably crucial exercise in imagining how one might sympathize with a variety of modes of response.

I cannot leave the topic of audiencing without another observation. I want to call attention to one dimension of self-consciousness in responding to the arts by invoking Kant's distinction between liking a work and judging a work to be beautiful. In our intellectual culture we might want to stress other forms of judgment and weaken Kant's claims for universals. But the same distinction holds. Judging work entails postulating a general standard and assuming others can rationally discuss the particular claims. Teaching in the arts is not just a matter of sharing likes and dislikes. Rather it involves an act of faith that aesthetic experience is a primary location for feeling intensely a subjectivity that is not complete without seeking the agreement of other people. The seeking itself constitutes a potentially significant sense of involvement with a public more expansive than an ideologically consistent community. And when we make such judgments we put ourselves in the position of an appreciator—that is one who sees the good in how the made object deals with experience. Such an achievement seems a minor value given all the urgent problems heaped upon us by social realities. But if you consider that appreciation is in most registers incompatible with resentment, then dispositions oriented toward appreciation can be seen as capable of significant interventions in a world increasingly shaped by emotional violence towards anything that might be seen as threatening to self-interest.

IV

I conclude with another short poem dramatizing what the work doubling can do in order to intensify and to complicate this Kantian sense of how reading involves awareness of other people as cooperating agents. This development should make clearer how education in the arts is in the interests of most students because the focus is on developing distinctive attitudes inviting complex attention to particular states of mind while also fostering sensibilities involved in thinking through the affective dimensions of volatile social situations.

This is Langston Hughes' poem "Harlem":

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Hughes's poem is obviously political. But its major point is not to make an argument or express a feeling but to create a particular object that embodies a condition of feeling and thinking about feeling. Doubling here occurs in three basic ways. First, it matters a great deal that the poem is about the dream, rather than about dreamers. For it posits a collective entity that people might attach to, but do not control. And it opens the space for a level of existence that can be pervasive without quite being visible or controllable. It is not a huge generalization that politics has to deal with the dreamers, while art can try to make visible and concrete the conditions of a shared dream. Then it can try to imagine conditions of agency that are themselves appropriate to this collective entity. Second, the focus on the dream is accompanied by an intricate overlay of questions. Literally there is an overarching question that generates a series of more particular questions. But a central feature of the doubling is that there is an even more basic question: to whom is the poem speaking. So issues of agency frame the series of specific questions—why these similes and to what do they add up. Finally, there is a huge shift to a rhymed couplet at the end.

How does the poem change because of that shift to a directness of expression for which no simile can be adequate. The stanza responding to the opening question seems to evade the issue it poses by offering several inquiries with corresponding similes that introduce a range of possible affective states. The first and the fourth similes raise the possibility that the deferred dream will simply get absorbed into the textures of daily life. But the similes lying between those propose a quite different temporality. "Festering like a sore" and "smelling like rotten meat" present conditions without temporal frameworks. Something must be done. But as yet there is no promise of a mode of agency to turn the feelings of deep dissatisfaction into any kind of action.

It is in the concluding lines that the poem becomes most direct. The final simile, "maybe it just sags/ like a heavy load" seems the simplest and least destructive, although that load disrupts any likely progress and intensifies frustration with the situation. The final rhyme considerably intensifies the likely result of this deferral. Imminent violence seems embedded in the situation. Yet no revolutionary agent appears. There is obviously no hope for one. But there also emerges the likelihood that there is no need for one. Instead there is a growing and disabling frustration that affects the entire populace. The agency will be collective. And here the one couplet in the poem, a very strong one, does considerable work in establishing what seems the inevitability of this explosion, without modifiers that might suggest any human control. The poem makes no judgments about behavior, only about social conditions that produce despair by cancelling every source of hope in anything other than necessity. That necessity is blind, caring only about relief from painful frustration, without any concern for what happens in the future. This rhyme insists that concerns for the future might have to give away to what seems by the end the only alternative to that "heavy load." And that alternative belies all the dithering of similes and the effort to invoke lyric devices to handle historical tragedy.

I am tempted to characterize this poem as shaping an attitude of revolutionary despair because the collective frustration seems the only effective form of agency. Such a condition ironically demands this brevity and lack of any concern for persons who might provide complex judgments. But even if I do not get the tone quite right, I have to ask where this final couplet leaves readers, black and white? Answering this question requires returning to the choice to have the poem concentrate on the dream, rather than on the dreamers. This shift in focus might afford a level of objectivity on which people might agree on how much harm deferring this dream might produce for the social order. Of course, Harlem will suffer the most: that is the cost of its populace being so badly treated that they need the dream in the first place. And almost all white readers can only make gestures toward sympathizing with conditions they cannot know directly—both with regard to what causes the deferred dream and to what the explosion will cost. But each group might better understand the other, because Hughes has captured the situation in such intimate and complex terms that avoid subjective differences. And that consequential avoidance might even produce an intelligible and shared anger at abdications of responsibility basic to American politics. Choices about linguistic presentation can matter in many dimensions of experience.

V

I think everything I have been saying is either explicit or clearly implicit in Hegel's aesthetic theory. I have evaded any claims about Hegel so far because I do not want to confuse my educational proposals with any kind of abstract metaphysical or historical concerns. But before I close I should make these affinities clear because Hegel is a lot more forceful than I am in clarifying how the arts matter for cultural life. Here I will just stress two features of Hegel on art. The first is the importance of treating the arts as vehicles whereby spirit finds fulfillment in taking sensuous forms that open into an inner life embodying imaginative energies. Hegel is the great theorist of doubling even though he does not emphasize the term.¹⁰ The second is the dialectical model by which that doubling affords a new content to be discovered by consciousness eager to adapt the experience to its understanding of its own historical situation. That is, Hegel clarifies the ultimate goal of teaching in the arts by his idealizations of self-consciousness. The work of spirit—I prefer to say imaginative intensity—presents the possibility of new subject positions, capable of understanding and appreciating how aspects of the world get transformed and grasped as significant experience. The new subject position allows agents to understand themselves as objects of historical forces and yet take responsibility for such situations by expanding how they imagine what subjectivity can become.

We first have to recognize that perhaps because Hegel is so abstract, he has a powerful compensatory commitment to the sensuousness of art as spirit's means of expressing itself:

These sensuous shapes and sounds appear in art not merely for themselves and their immediate shape, but with the aim, in this shape, of affording satisfaction to higher spiritual interests, since they have the power to call forth from all the depths of consciousness a sound and an echo in the spirit. In this way the sensuous aspect of art is spiritualized, since the spirit appears in art as made sensuous. (LFA 39)¹¹

And that emphasis on sensuous concreteness requires a distinctive form of judgment open to how doubling works. We have to understand how the sensuous can implicate the domain of meaning. The key is to appreciate how the concrete work invites mind to inhabit the substantial features of what is expressed in the work. Judgment then becomes the analysis of how connection is constituted and why that specific constitution might matter for the states of self-consciousness that the work of art can elicit. Art therefore is opposed to philosophy, which seeks to absorb that sensuous world within conceptual structures. Art offers imaginatively animated particulars rather than concepts.

Then, second, we have to draw tight links between judgment of the work and the nature of the dynamic self-consciousness that it elicits and rewards. This is where Hegel's greatest contribution to aesthetic education lies—in his sense of why it matters to engage the expressive processes elaborated in the arts. Expression is pressing out of significance based on passionate engagements in situations. But for Hegel there are always two sources—how the subject feels and how that feeling might be anchored in the specific way that imagination inhabits the world. Romantic thinking emphasizes the subjective feeling as transforming the object. Hegelian thinking emphasizes the ways that subjective feeling can sponsor reflection in how it is anchored in what imagination produces in sensuous form.¹² Aesthetic judgment affords a site where “the thinking spirit” can know itself again after “it has surrendered its proper form to feeling and sense, to comprehend itself in its opposite” (LFA p. 13.).

Thus for Hegel the focus of the philosophy of art shifts from demands for explanation to a willingness to engage the kind of thinking that involves “reflection on the mode of its productivity and practice” (LA p. 27). Art is the way humans bring the self before itself “by *practical* activity” enabling a person to alter “external things whereon he impresses the seal of his own inner being.” That positioning makes “spiritual inspiration conspicuous” (LA 29) by concentrating on how self-consciousness of one's powers as spirit becomes possible through acts of engaging sensuous particulars: “Only by this active placing of himself before himself” does a person make visible the quality of spirit's engagement with the world (LFA 31).¹³

All this talk of self-consciousness would be mere self-absorption if Hegel did not perform the crucial task of defining positive cultural roles for that process because of its functioning within what

we might call “the dialectics of everyday life.” All of my speculation is an effort to come to terms with this remarkable passage from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*:

Only after it has externalized this individuality in the sphere of culture, thereby giving it existence, and establishing it through the whole of existence ... only then does it turn the thought of its inmost depths outward and enunciate essence as ‘I’ = ‘I’. ... In other words, the ‘I is not merely the Self, but *the identity of the self with itself*; but this identity is complete and immediate oneness with Self, or this *Subject* is just as much *Substance*.¹⁴

On the left side of the equation is the work of the self-conscious effort to express how it engages certain features of experience in order to feel itself fully engaged in a given situation. The right side of the equation involves how history and the force of situations define what demands expression by the subjective “I.” Neither side of the equation involves fixed entities.

Rather both sides are continually adjusting their responses to what the other seems to demand. Take for example how the situation on the right side of the equation can challenge the subjective side by revealing aspects of the world that actually negate how the psychological subject establishes identity for itself. That side of the equation is a version of Emerson’s Nature as the not me. So the situation on the right side of the equation can complicate the subjective side, by revealing aspects of the world that challenge how the subject pole establishes identity for itself.

Probably the clearest general account of this dialectical principle occurs when Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* develops his criticism of empiricist idealizations of the “here” and the “now” because he thinks both terms are empty without the elaboration of contexts.¹⁵ Suppose the “here” before consciousness appears to be a straightforward scene of an apparently idyllic landscape. Then the left side of the equation needs only relatively simple judgment taking direct pleasure in what is before the eye. But the situation can change, for example when the ‘I’ becomes suspicious of that ease, as if it began to fear that it was ignoring potentially disturbing aspects of the scene. Danger may be lurking in what seems innocent. Or an element of the scene may emerge that reminds one of how the scene implicates a history of injustice. Such suspicions negate the way the subject initially appropriates the scene as a source of innocent pleasures. Once uneasiness arises, the agent will have to call upon capacities for complexity of feeling and intellectual judgment concerning historical forces in order to respond dialectically to this negation. A new subject position must be constructed. The agent would have to question any direct identifications with the characters in the scenes insofar as these identifications might factor in that unease.

So the agent would have to become self-reflexively critical of its earlier emotional investments. For example, the shaping imagination in art can cultivate various kinds of impersonality that are not opposed to the subjective but present ways of seeing what subjects can share and the powers that accrue to that sharing.¹⁶ We have to appreciate how the dialectical process affords a great deal of flexibility in our imagining subjective agency. The psychological person is central early in my narrative of the pastoral idyll. But as the situation takes on multiple dimensions, the subjective pole has to expand in accord with what is being registered. The earlier investments have to be negated, and that fact of negation has to become a basic aspect of the objectivity of the scene.

Hence the subject has to find ways of re-thinking and re-feeling if it is to take responsibility for having the experience of how the objective situation has changed, and is changing her. Eventually the subject cannot feel adequate to the emerging object before her unless she tries to develop a stance for feeling and for thinking that engage what now seems the actual objective world. As substance gets more complicated the subject position has to become more inclusive as a site for shared feelings evoked by the new situation. Ultimately Hegel can construct an Absolute because if the subject’s position can become truly philosophical, it eventually can merge with a true account of what comprises the real where subjective intensities and objective conditions merge completely, bringing an end to the inadequacies of merely historical understanding.

VI

These are portentous claims. But here I am less interested in their truth than in the way they focus attention on certain aspects of reading, especially the role of self-consciously watching who one becomes in the reading. Let me then close by returning to Langston Hughes's poem "Harlem," with a focus on how readers are invited to see themselves positioned and re-positioned. It goes without saying that I imagine the primary role of teaching literature as stressing how such positioning can make readers aware of the force by which imagination might function in the real world.

The poem initially proposes several possible subject positions, all of which present weak fantasies of how natural forces might eliminate the dreaming of change, that makes life in Harlem continually oppressive. The various initial scenarios seem sheer wishes that something might happen despite paralyzed human agents. There is no subject position invoked that might produce the desired change. That lack of forceful subject positions is also evident in how "explode" emerges as a surprising, but causally intricate rhyme with "load." Is this just another fantasy without the support of human agency? Or is this an evocation of something more grand and more positive than anything which human agents could deliberately construct? In this second case, keeping Hegel in mind, we might ask if we can reconstitute that lack of responsibility as a dialectical feature of the imagined situation. Perhaps the lack of subject positions is less a failure of agency, than a setting the scene for a recognition that other factors, more powerful than human ones, will be necessary for any change to occur.

The lack of subject position could be only wistful, a vague sense of hopelessness. But that lack becomes much more ominous because of the conclusion. The possibility of explosion also bypasses human agency. But now that bypassing is a yielding to more powerful factors, rather than wishful fantasies of simple transformation. We are asked to recognize that while the conditions in Harlem were created by human agents, the situation (or substance) seems to have taken on a life of its own – that will be responsive only to modes of absolute force beyond the capacities of human planning. Hughes's version of "I = I" in fact requires several transformations of agency: the desire to avoid human agency becomes in fact a precise account of what humans cannot do on their own to change what they have made as history, and the explosion would become a measure of what might eventually make other forms of human agency possible.

Then those who can occupy the implied subject position of the "I," which history makes much more capacious than the state of individual egos, now have to see that this new "I" is inseparable from the substance of historical circumstance. The effort to escape human agency ends up in the forced observation that the subject position humans choose must admit its having become abject and useless. But this discovery seen in a Hegelian light allows for the reworking of failure into the capacity to identify collectively with this non-human hope for explosion. Like the slave who in the *Phenomenology* gets defeated by the master, defeat blocks any hope for power as an isolated subject. But it opens one to the force of joining in communal efforts to bring new order to nature. Here the communal factor is limited to hope, but given the realities of the situation it might be the failures of human agency that in fact produce communal awareness of what may be necessary. Neglect too, can transform what we have to realize about the substance of history.

Notes

¹ Defenses of literary education are in fashion now, as they should be given how most universities are treating the teaching of all of the humanities. But following the fashion will do more harm than good if the defenses are based on little more than injured pride and resistance to the triumph of STEM disciplines. This is why I try to distinguish aspects of experience that require or at least reward an emphasis on display and affective engagement rather than efforts to demonstrate how objects not intended to provide any kind of knowledge in fact do serve cognitive interests. Given my concern for alternatives to cognitive goals for literary study, I have to begin by repudiating three kinds of discourses about the need for literary and arts education in University education. The first is intelligently represented by Michael Clune's *Defense of Judgment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2021). Clune is an acute critic of the attempts by literary critics to dignify their practices by focusing on the moral judgments the study of literature can sustain. He insists that such judgments depend on a universalizing process not compatible with the tendency in most important literary works to elaborate particular situations in order to stress their distinctiveness. So he tried instead to reconstruct aesthetic judgment so that it can stress how cognitive interests in forms of knowledge are fostered in these developments of particular situations. But from my perspective literary education should be concerned with knowledge only in relation to cultural practices and historical situations pertaining to texts. Concerns for the particularity of texts simply cannot live up to the standards for what counts as actionable knowledge provided by the sciences. There will be inevitable tensions between the emotions activated by the rendering of particulars and the kinds of generalization that support significant claims to knowledge. I try to elaborate this concern for particularity in this chapter and I feel confident in aligning with the general criticism of Clune along these lines by Joshua Adams's review essay "Ideas as Aesthetics: On Michael W. Clune's *A Defense of Judgment*," *Chicago Review*, 2021.

The second problem is represented by two defenses of the place of great books in general education by Roosevelt Montas, *Rescuing Socrates: How the Great Books Changed my Life and Why They Matter for a New Generation* (Princeton, 2021) and Arnold Weinstein, *The Lives of Literature: Reading, Teaching, Knowing*. These books rely on testimonial evidence and the pursuit of noble ideals while dismissing literary and aesthetic theory as destructive postmodern invasions of the sacred space created by an individual's pursuit of self-knowledge by means of reading the great books. Dismissing all theory because some theory allies with cultural criticism and skepticism about the pursuit of traditional values leaves only personal testimony for how these books cultivate self-knowledge. Some attention to theory might help clarify the grounds for these knowledge claims and elicit some shame at using the self as exemplary object of analysis for idealizations of what the teacher can produce.

The final problematic discourse is the most disturbing of all. I have only one example but I suspect that its attitudes will prevail in an increasingly cynical literary academy. I refer to Louis Menand's review of these two books "Too Good for this World" in *The New Yorker* Dec 20, 2021: 64–68. Menand stages a distanced authorial position somewhere between contempt and ironic bemusement. For him claims about the great books as vehicles for self-knowledge simply evade the evidence of cultural change that seems to proclaim an inevitable decline in the importance of literary education. Bolstered by how easily these books fail to offer any kind of reasoned defense, Menand comes to identify entirely with the social sciences. I cannot resist citing a sentence near the triumphant close of his argument that "education is about empowering people to deal with things as they are" (68). Before turning to this sentence, it will help if we recognize how the claim to capture "Things as they are" is as vague as claims that great books produce a distinctive self-knowledge. Why cannot "things as they are" include labors for improvement of our basic educational practices. Menand's adamant refusal to be seduced by literary illusion evading things as they are then produces this surprising assertion: "The idea that students develop a greater capacity for empathy by reading books in literature classes about people who never existed than they can by taking classes in fields that study actual human behavior does not make a lot of sense" (68). "Exist" is a funny word here because some individuals in literature, like Woolf's Mrs. Ramsey or Ellison's invisible man become more real for many than living people can be because they are articulated with such strong individuality. But then someone who prefers the generalizations about types of behavior that is the ordinary fare of psychology classes may be willfully blind to the force of such individuals. He seems to prefer generalizations about real behavior so that he can remain in the world of typical behaviors. But can a literary critic stay there. His most realistic gesture becomes also apparently his deepest illusion. Not content with his impersonal distance, Menand concludes with what he thinks is a clinching personal assertion. He teaches the great books and has learned a lot from them from when he was

seventeen, but “I don’t think I am a better person.” But he also seems to ignore the fact that his tone and his lapses in logic may indicate how much better a person he needs to be.

² Noe, *Strange Tools*. Hill and Wang 2015.

³ In the case of “example of,” the particular example is explained by the category: the case is an instance of a class. But in the case of “example as,” the particular example becomes the category. In the first case Hamlet can illustrate Renaissance understandings of melancholy or Invisible Man can illustrate the effects of racial prejudice. In the second case Hamlet becomes a figure inviting us to identify with his confusions and the invisible man dramatizes a version of finding oneself trapped in destructive self-consciousness. I elaborate the theoretical issues in working with this distinction in my work: *Reckoning with the Imagination: Wittgenstein and the Aesthetics of Literary Experience*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2015.

⁴ There is a long standing critique in aesthetic theory of the primacy of practical modes of judgment when other modes of reflection seem capable of fuller engagement with particular experiences.

1) Practical judgment has to choose consistency of aspect and so must carve paths of analysis that are aspect blind. Practical judgment must seek clear pictures and most often sacrifice complexity for generality or universality. Reducing situations to statistical probabilities is one extreme example.

2) Practical judgement goes astray when it gets fascinated by particulars—say the changing face of a beloved or the ways connotations haunt denotations.

3) Much art requires a sensibility that involves seeing into particulars rather than assessing them in categorical terms. The strongest statement of this involves a kind of double vision and a demand for constantly switching between the material and the figurative or implicational as the means for processing how objects can appeal to evaluation or involvement. Such seeing in (or seeing as in order to see in) can build intensities and develop corresponding sympathies as we come to see in the particular the need to resolve forces within its ways of manifesting itself that are in tension or states of confusion.

On “seeing in” see Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art*.

⁵ For Wallace Stevens on “realization” see *Stevens Collected Poetry and Prose*. Library of America, 1997. And for the relation of W.C. Williams to Cézanne’s principles see my essay “Ponderation in Cezanne and Williams.”

⁶ This exploration will eventually lead me to engage William James and F.H. Bradley on the concept of experience, to characterize social relations established when we engage purposive objects where attunement becomes more important than cognition, and to speculate on how our examples help us appreciate certain dimensions of the claims by Nietzsche and Wittgenstein that aesthetics and ethics are one. To the extent that the pursuit of psychological states in which we can find satisfaction is important for the question why be ethical at all, aesthetic experience is crucial in fostering desires inseparable from ethical decision making.

⁷ I hold back the title for an endnote because I think *Boy with a Knapsack* is probably a joke that adds a level of irony to the painting. An observer unfamiliar with modern art might just try to see the image as a boy in red bent over by trying to carry the heavy black knapsack. The irony then is that the painting’s effort to double the marks usually deployed for description can itself produce audience efforts to transform the new into the old. The old title was *Suprematist Composition; Red Square and Black Square*.

⁸ This is the best critical statement I know celebrating the powers invoked by what realization can do in art:

“What is prehensile is what is able to grasp, take hold of, and by extension grasp sensitively, intimately in the sense of closely, like the monkey’s tail on the branch, or the fingers on the ladder rung when the foot slips. As applied to the imagination then, the prehensile quality is the quality of being in direct, absolute, and undifferentiated contact with the substance of interest. It can be thought of at one end as the quality of raw experience and at the other end as the sphinx quality of experience. It may be either pure response or pure knowledge. Either aspect of such experience is common in actual life, focal in religious life, and the central object in works of imagination. It is the doorknob held or turned; it is the quality of experience which comes with unmitigated attention. Unmitigated attention may be easy in the bloodstream, in love, before the face looking in the window; but in the life of the mind it is the hardest condition to come by. In one respect it is a freed condition secured by absolute surrender of the will; and in another respect it is an imprisoned condition imposed by the utter absorption of the will. The point is that all that is intermediate in the ordinary run of things is made immediate; which is what we mean when we say that breathing becomes breathless, hope becomes terror, or time stands still, but without any cessation, in any of these cases, of life, faith, or motion, and with an excess of inward, of mutual verisimilitude. That – the heightened sense of being, of self-proving identity, of the authority of experience – that is what the prehensile imagination grasps.” (R.P. Blackmur. “Afterward,” *The Spoils of Poynton*, New Directions, p. 229.)

⁹ Max Scheler. *On Feeling, Knowing, and Valuing*.

¹⁰ See for example Hegel's *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, translated by T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), vol 1, p, 36 ;The mode of spiritual apprehension affords objectivity for inner being, which makes "an abstraction" out of "something sensually concrete" in order to produce "something essentially other than what that same object was in its sensuous appearance." Or consider how Hegel posits the realm of aesthetic judgment as one where "the thinking spirit" can know itself again "when it has surrendered its proper form to feeling and sense, to comprehend itself in its opposite" (LFA 13).

¹¹ See also LFA 35: "The work of art, as a sensuous object, is not merely for sensuous apprehension; it's standing is of such a kind, that, although sensuous, it is essentially at the same time for spiritual apprehension; the spirit is meant to be affected by it and to find some satisfaction in it.

¹² This sense of spirit defined in terms of self-consciousness is at the core of Charles Taylor's elaborate and engaging treatment of the concept of expression in his *Hegel*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975). Because the concept is so central here I want my readers to have one of Hegel's precise formulations: Things in nature are only immediate and single, while man as spirit duplicates himself, in that 1) he is as things in nature are, but 2) he is just as much for himself; he sees himself, represents himself to himself, thinks, and only on the basis of this active placing himself before himself is he spirit" (LFA 31).

¹³ I cannot resist citing another passage where Hegel is explicit on the relation of poetry to self-consciousness: The chief task of poetry is to bring before our minds that power governing spiritual life, and in short, all that surges to and fro in human passion and feeling or passes quietly through our meditation ... [A person] must know what the powers are which drive and direct him, and it is such a knowledge that poetry provides in its original and substantive form. (LFA 973)

¹⁴ Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 489 par 803. See also in PS, pp 408–9, par 671), and pp. 490–91, pars 804–805. And in LFA see 92–93 and in volume II all of Section III of Part III.

¹⁵ PS, the Chapter on "Observing Reason" and the pages leading up to it—131–210.

¹⁶ In elaborating these claims I will be resisting the tendency of critics like Maud Ellman, *The Poetics of Impersonality: T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound* to see impersonality as a sign of defensiveness unwilling to risk personal honesty. In my view contemporary emphases on impersonality as self-protectiveness simply refuse to attend to the possibility that impersonality can offer ways of treating subjectivity that stress the inadequacy of the personal while also defining modes of self-consciousness that in fact often liberate us from ourselves.

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Working Art: Thought, Acting and Knowing

TON KRUSE

“That voice – did other people have that too? Did all the others have that too? And what was it, that voice – was it you yourself, or not, or not completely, or was it only at times where you were not aware of yourself? Maybe it was your mirror image, that coincided with you as soon as you caught her. Or was it the only thing that mattered and was all other shell, just like your body. Maybe it was something that relentlessly fed you without you realizing it. Did you have to let it have its way, or, if you weren’t careful, would you then become its meek slave? And did its presence mean that you would start mumbling a little to yourself when you got old? However, it had been there for as long as Louise could remember: the inner monologue, that started upon awakening and that continued to reason, to gather and formulate arguments, reformulate and rearrange – in her case often in the form of a discussion with someone who had said or done something that bothered her.”¹

The inner monologue, the process of thought that continuously interprets whatever happens and is experienced. Even: what has happened, could happen or should happen – and: what was experienced and that one imagines to experience, or desires to experience. That inner debate in which we relate to what surrounds us, to what happens to us and to what we hear of and imagine of that it is or could be ‘there’.

Personally, I would rather choose the term: inner dialogue. Because, it is a speaking and debating with oneself – or, with an imagined other, or another who is not present and to whom we speak in our imagination. It is the inner voice that Hannah Arendt researched in her unfinished work: the *Life of the Mind*, and whereof she therein wrote: “The thinking activity – according to Plato the dialogue we in silence have with ourselves – serves only to open the eyes of the mind.”²

Of course, these *eyes of the mind*, are meant in a metaphorical sense by Arendt. It is the ‘eyes’ with which we learn to ‘see’ what things are (there) and what they (might) mean or be.³ This seeing activity takes place in language, says Arendt: “thoughts ... cannot exist without being spoken.”⁴ She adds, “We know that *noemai* (ancient Greek – TK) was first used in the sense of perception with the eyes; then it was transferred to the perceptions of the mind and came to mean “to grasp”; finally it became another word for the highest form of thought.”

She there talks of the ‘thought-thing’, in contrast to the physical, empirical thing. The thing as it is ‘seen’ in the mind. Seeing, one of our senses, is – in a meaningful way – related to sense (meaning). Seeing and grasping (which refers to the sense of touch) are related to hearing (another sense) and to understanding, which in turn relates to how words are understood – as Arendt says – as ‘meaningful noise’.⁵ And this cognitive faculty is related to how words have referring meaning and make sense in sentences: “The *logos* is the speech in which words are brought together into a sentence, which is meaningful in its entirety thanks to the synthesis (*synthêkê*),” wrote Arendt. The thought-thing is the thought (or: re-imagined) empirical thing, that becomes meaningful in relation to other things that are thought (*synthesis*, *syntax*).⁶

Having said this, it becomes obvious that in the arts these issues of meaning and understanding have become ostensive. What is either seen, heard or read is approached as intrinsically *meaningful*. We aim to understand what a work of art means and may mean to us. We wonder why anyone has made the effort to *make* such a thing (*happen*). Why was that poem written? Why is this piece being performed? Why was that painting done?

These questions are fundamentally what is studied at Universities all over the world in the divergent fields of the Humanities. It is the type of study and activity that, like the act of thinking, does not serve any other use than a predisposition to want to learn and understand. It is the fundamental motivation for all science, art and study. It is the simple question: what is that, what does that mean? with which all thinking activity starts.

Thought, Acting and Language

In her essay for 'Thinking in Art' (eds. P. Sonderer and H. Borgdorff, Leiden University Press, 2012)⁷ Prof. Dr. Janneke Wesseling states that a work of art is 'an object' 'that has expressiveness'.⁸ To 'make' a work of art, an artist must learn 'to connect the two worlds of thinking and acting,' says Wesseling there.

It must first become a question, however, whether an object-like quality is really an important aspect of a work of art – let alone a necessary aspect. In other words: is a work of art necessarily a thing, an object? When we think of a performative work of (visual) art, such as *This objective of that object* (Steven Sehgal, 2004)⁹, there is no material object that bears any inscriptions of the maker. In this case, there is not even a record of it in the form of a 'recipe', such as Bas Jan Ader, for example, still did (as in his: *Thoughts unsaid, then forgotten*).¹⁰ Apparently, a work of art is not bound by inscriptions made in materials, driven by the creator's thoughts. Even a note of the thoughts is not necessary to do, to be or to make a work of art, as the aforementioned work of Sehgal proves.¹¹ There may well be no thing, no object – but there can be a work of art that can be recognized by its properties.

Therefore, the relationship between thinking and acting is complicated in a work of art, even if we distinguish these domains from each other and approach them as separate 'worlds', as Dr. Wesseling does in her relevant essay. Again, it must first become a question, especially when it comes to a work of art, whether action is even possible without thought. An action without thought seems to indicate a chance event, such as events driven by natural forces. Events that happen by chance, without purpose, driven by impersonal forces. But doesn't a work of art necessarily have, if not a use, a purpose? If nothing else, at the very least: to be a work of art? A work that belongs to the domain of art? So, when one says that an artist must learn to connect thinking and acting, this seems to be a learning point that is essentially incomprehensible.

Subsequently, professor Wesseling says in her essay that 'the interaction between making and thinking (...) cannot (...) be described completely, no more than all layers of meaning in a work of art can be expressed in language. After all, if that were the case, the artwork would be superfluous.' And she adds: 'Also, language is not by definition necessary for the creation of a work of art. It is possible that a work of art is created intuitively, almost subconsciously (...). Nevertheless, or perhaps just then, for the continuation of the artistic process the need remains to understand what has happened and to (try to) name it.'¹² Wesseling has replaced the previously used concept of 'acting' here with the concept of 'making'.

Making (in Dutch: *maken*) has the following description in the Middelnederlandsch Dictionary:

'to prepare; construct; determine; correspond; draw up; recreate; manufacture; describe; conclude; to build; create; set up; produce; to form; to bring in a certain condition; to do; cause; to restore; imitate; being the essence of something; to amount; getting ready; to bring one selves in a certain condition; to betake; to pretend to be something or someone'.¹³

The *Dictionary of the Dutch Language* does not give any significant changes in more recent meanings and use of *making*.¹⁴ The concept 'making' relates to the concept of 'acting', because as a meaning is mentioned – among others: to do. *Doing* means *acting*. *Making* shares its active meanings as a verb with *acting*. However, 'to act' also has the meaning of 'to act badly with someone',¹⁵ which touches on 'treating'. Here, as with 'making', it is about treating someone in a certain way in both words (!) and deeds. This, in turn, fits in with the meanings *describing* and *forming* of 'making', whereby the last meaning: forming, in relation to language-use can also be used as *formulating* in my opinion.

The term *making* seems to semantically cover a wide range of actions and ways of acting. In the light of professor Wesseling's argumentation, we now must ask ourselves: Can *making* and *acting* take place, without thinking and language? What is the relationship between language and thought? Is it possible to think outside language? What kind of thinking then, could a thinking be without language? Dr. Wesseling opts for the concept of 'the subconscious' in her essay, and describes it as a thinking for which no language is needed, or is present in.¹⁶ Because, a work of art that is created intuitively, is created almost subconsciously, according to Wesseling.¹⁷ Language was not necessary in the creation of such a work of art, she states. If we would agree to that, can we then say as well, that a thinking in which language does play a role, is conscious? And is that kind of thought then the opposite of an 'intuitive', i.e. emotional thinking? Can then such a linguistic and conscious thinking perhaps be called rational thinking? And is rational thinking then, in opposition to intuitive thinking, necessarily a thinking without feeling involved?

Viewed in this way, Dr. Wesseling seems to say that the emotional (the intuitive) is subconscious and unnameable (it needs no language and it cannot be expressed), which might allow the inference that the conscious is nameable. However, the emotional and subconscious are not entirely unnameable for Wesseling. In part, it *can* be named, and that is important for understanding it, she says. Trying to name and understand this is important for 'the continuation of the artistic process,' she states. But she also argues that if all the layers of meaning of a work of art could be named, the work of art would be superfluous. But what then can be the meaning of an unnameable meaning? It seems that for Wesseling this is the emotional, which is unnamed and therefore also subconscious. This mindset reminds me of the value attached to irrationality in Breton's surrealism.¹⁸ In this case the question would now become: what does a meaning mean of which one is not aware, because one cannot name it?

The *Dictionary of the Dutch Language* (WNT) makes the concept of *intuitive* even more puzzling in relation to thought, language and art. It gives this description of it:

'Outgoing from, based on the intuition; not mediated by the senses or by reason or intellect; spontaneously.'

And intuition is in the same dictionary:

'The immediate comprehension; the understanding, grasping, understanding without the intervention of the senses or reason.'

The well-known, Dutch Van Dale Dictionary says about intuition: 'insight without thinking.'

Under the concept of 'insight', the Dictionary of the Dutch Language indicates a perhaps clarifying distinction:

'Meanings and views, which are related to 'seeing through / penetration'¹⁹: Consideration, in different views; Abstract: Contemplation, way of seeing, conception, feeling, judgment - and: Concrete: Way of seeing, opinion, thought, idea.'

And the Etymological Dictionary²⁰ adds:

'Latin 'intuitus' [looking at, gaze, face], from 'in' [in] + 'tucri' [contemplate, perceive].'

Attempting to summarise, intuition appears to be about an unmediated knowing - a 'seeing' or an insight, achieved not with the senses, but with the mind. The mind as a faculty that however is described as: not reason, but still the insight is described: as a judgment, view and thought - and also as: conception, understanding and, surprisingly, as: feeling. Perhaps: A spiritual feeling, but not reasoning or formulating, which nevertheless leads to a form of knowledge (insight). We must best conclude that *intuitive* is an ambiguous and therefore elusive concept.

Continuing her essay, Dr. Wesseling does not make things any clearer. In the relevant essay she refers to the distinction Kant made between 'Verstand' and 'Vernunft', via Hannah Arendt's 'The Life of the Mind':

‘What is the meaning of words such as knowing, knowledge and thinking? Hannah Arendt discusses this in the first part of her book *The Life of the Mind*, entitled *Thinking*. Here she elaborates on Kant’s distinction between two ways of thinking, *Vernunft* and *Verstand*. Arendt translates these as respectively: reason and intellect. The distinction between the two, which can respectively be translated in Dutch as ‘begrip’ (understanding) and ‘verstand’ (intelligence), coincides, in her opinion, with the distinction between meaning and cognition or knowledge. (...) Understanding transcends (...) the limitations of cognition, namely the criteria of certainty and proof. In the words of Arendt: ‘*The need for reason is not inspired by the quest for truth but by the quest for meaning. And meaning and truth are not the same.*’²¹

Verstand (intellect, in Arendt) means for Kant: the ability to form concepts from the multitude of observations of the outside world – and subsequently, to systematically form judgements about them. Kant calls the knowledge coming from this type of thinking: knowledge *a posteriori* – knowledge derived from experience – experience here in the sense of: perception. *Vernunft* (reason, in Arendt) is for Kant the more encompassing faculty of cognition, which forms speculative and argumentative connections and recognizes values. Kant calls the knowledge that comes from this type of thought: knowledge *a priori* – knowledge of what is given in advance, prior to experience – again in the sense of perception – or that is added independently of experience. This means that the knowledge of phenomena is not only analysed but also becomes expanded through synthesis and reasoning. An example of *Vernunft* are theoretical mathematics according Kant (mathematics produce a synthetic knowledge, that is not based upon perception but on reason). But above all, Kant says:

‘Without sense no object would be given to us, and without reason no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, perceptions without concepts are blind.’²²

In Kant, therefore, *Verstand* and *Vernunft* do not function independently of each other, but these two qualities of thinking, of cognition, complement each other. I think it is perhaps fair to say that the opposition of understanding and knowing that Dr. Wesseling suggests in her essay, in which the scientist uses only *Verstand* – which leads to knowledge, and the artist uses only *Vernunft* – which leads to understanding, is not as black and white with Kant and with Arendt.

What is the meaning of words such as knowing, knowledge and thinking, asks professor Wesseling in the relevant essay. She finds ‘the claim that art also produces knowledge ... a hollow phrase when it is impossible to explain what this kind of knowledge is and how it is produced.’ She would rather ask ‘how’ an artist thinks than ‘what’ the artist knows.²³ But shouldn’t the question be first: *can* knowledge be acquired through, with and in art? Only then the question of *what* the nature is of such knowledge, and *how* it is produced, becomes relevant. In the path chosen by Wesseling, it is no longer about becoming acquainted with the type of knowledge that art produces, nor about researching if art can produce knowledge at all, but about becoming acquainted with how an artist thinks, because she assumes (without argumentation) that it is impossible to explain what kind of knowledge art produces.

How someone thinks can be approached from a psychological viewpoint, but also from a biological viewpoint (neurology). The first approach has a perhaps more speculative nature, but in a sense that, to date, has also proved to perhaps be more productive than the second.²⁴ The second approach is perhaps more empirical and analytic, but provides (as of yet) but little insight into the content and nature of thinking or into the mind in relation to the brain. Rather, the neurological approach provides foremost insights into the chemical and biological processes in the brain, not as much in thought itself.

Another road for asking after the ‘how’ of someone’s thinking, or a certain type of thinking, is the perspective of methodology. Knowledge of which system or logic is used in thinking (about something) is also knowledge of the ‘how’ of a type of thought. This is a more phenomenological or epistemological approach. How an artist thinks can therefore be answered psychologically, biologically or methodologically. These three paths of research lead however, to knowledge and insights of a rather diverse nature.

It seems to me, that when we want to understand something about art (about the work of art and subsequently of artisthood), the question if art produces knowledge, is infinitely more productive than asking how an artist might think. I feel that the question of how an artist functions psychologically and biologically is in contrast with this rather anecdotal – after all, one artist is like that and another was like that. It will be difficult to abstract from the divergent individual ways of thinking to a way of thinking that works for artists in general, methodologically. It is entirely possible too, that there will be divergent methods, several ways of thinking, that may lead to doing works of art.

Language, Experience and Art

In my chapter (#27): *Imagination in games: Formulation, Re-actualization and Gaining a World* in ‘Imagination and Art: Explorations in Contemporary Theory’ (eds K. Moser and A. C. Sukla, Brill, Leiden, 2020),²⁵ I elaborated which role language plays in the functioning of works of art. For that I chose ‘the game’ as the archetype for researching the working of the work of art. Game, as both image and instance for the work of art. The type of game that may perhaps work best in this regard, is children’s play. Children who have not yet fully acquired language are already playing with their fingers, and with the edges of cloths and the like. It is difficult to determine whether, and how much, language plays a role in this first play. It is tempting to say that such a first play is perhaps mainly about the *pleasure* of movement and about the *sense* of touch. One can determine that this behaviour is play, because it is already about repeating (more or less) the same actions. There already is a pattern, a rule that is followed – that is played out. It may be tempting to interpret this early game from the purpose of *practice*: the child is practicing its fine motor skills. I believe it is probable that this is in part true and fitting. But in later play, when children already possess some proficiency in language, language obviously plays a major role in game and play. Words are then often used when playing, which put the actions in a certain context and that establish a certain relationship between what the child does and what she or he thinks. More often, especially when the child has become more proficient in language, the actions of the game are being told at the same time. The game resembles a story that arises from playing, and that the child tells her- or himself while doing it. At the start of the game, there is often a certain framework established, within and with which is played. Which is also done by telling and describing. In my essay for *Imagination and Art* I call this the delineation or demarcation of the world of the game.

Think of the game: ‘Moms and Dads’, where children often start with the question: shall we do Moms and Dads? After that is agreed upon, certain additional agreements are made, such as: this was our house, and then I was the mother and you were the father, and this was our child. The world of the game is here defined and provided with rules and with its own narrative. A narrative that often extends into a (fictitious) history: things are so and so, because so and so had happened before. It is important for understanding how the work of art works, to establish here, that language has a key role in play. It demarcates the world of the game, it sets the rules and goals, and describes why things are the way they are in the game. I am not talking about what actually is or is not said in the game, but about how the game, in itself, is thought and conceived as a certain, as that specific game. Some things may well be left unsaid, but are taken for understood and agreed implicitly. Although ‘practice’ and ‘fun’ play an obvious role in this type of game, there is also the use of the imagination as an encompassing faculty of cognition.

Just as a work of art can be recognized by its properties, a specific game also distinguishes itself from another by possessing specific properties. Moms and Dads is a different game from playing Soldier, or playing Cops and Robbers. It is also possible to return to that one specific game, for example to a game of Moms and Dads that was interrupted. Children can interrupt the game, for example to have dinner or lunch, and return to it later. To continue playing it, or, as they sometimes say: ‘finish’ it. Also, players can call each other to order, if the other does something that is not right in and for that particular game. In my essay for *Imagination and Art*, I quote Gadamer, where he says:

'all playing is a being played'.²⁶ This means that it is not the player who determines the game, but that the game determines what the player can and cannot do – what can and what cannot be part of the game. This makes clear how much the game is 'itself', and why it is that children can call each other to its order. The latter can lead to a discussion, in which the players test and argue why something is or is not 'possible', or is or is not 'allowed' in the game. The game dictates what the player does. As Gadamer says:

'The game is only game if it is taken seriously. Earnestness is not only something that takes us away from the game, the game itself has to be played earnestly if it is to be completely game. Whoever does not take the game seriously is a spoilsport.'²⁷

The role that language plays in this aspect of the game is evident. A game is never 'just a game', because as soon that is said (and saying is thinking and acting at once!) all players are withdrawn from the game – and it already has disappeared. However, the game is only gone until the child (the player) that was called to order, changes its attitude, and starts playing the game again as that what the game in itself is and was. We can see herein that a specific game has specific properties, that can be pointed out and be discussed.

I want to add here that, just as the boundary between thought and language is mysterious (language is not a mere medium that the thought uses to express itself in, but is rather the place where the thought arises in and from), the boundary between play and reality is mysterious. Within the game, what is played out is just as real as everything that happens outside it. Until the game stops being played. What was experienced in the game (even if this was 'as if', that is: imagined), can be real experiences, in the sense that one learns something about the world or about oneself in the world.²⁸ As Gadamer has said it:

"If we gain an experience based on an object, it means that we have not seen things right so far and now know better how things are. It is not simply a mistake that is understood and ... corrected, but an insight that is obtained, with far-reaching consequences. Therefore, it cannot be a randomly picked up object to which one gains an experience, but it must be so that one can gain a better understanding on the basis of this, not only about this object, but about what one thought they knew before."

We see now that language and acting, or: thinking and acting (and remember: acting is also making), are mysteriously intertwined in play – just as play and reality are entwined. In my essay for *Imagination and Art*, I quote Paul Ricoeur, who says that the use of language is an act in itself.²⁹ On the one hand: that something is said (at a time and in a place, by someone to someone), and on the other hand: that this saying is understood as meaningful (something is said about something).³⁰ The dialectic of occurrence and meaning is, according to Ricoeur, preceded by the dialectic of meaning and reference.³¹ Every use of language 'is always about something', says Ricoeur: 'it refers to a world that it claims to describe, express or represent. The event is, in this ... sense: the creation of a world in language.'³² It should be clear that exactly this is what happens in game. Without language, the world of the game would not (or only very poorly) come to be. And this world of the game is in a meaningful way related to the living world in, through and by language – in ever wider circles. In my chapter for *Imagination and Art*, I call this: gaining knowledge about the world and about being in the world. By 'world' we simply mean, as Ricoeur says, 'the meaning we all understand when we say of a newborn child that it has come into the world.'³³ Ricoeur specifies that 'world' is the whole of all references that we seen or read, and have somehow 'understood'.

When we return to the working of the work of art from these insights about the role of language in play, the main question is whether language indeed has a similar role there. Ader's aforementioned work, *Thoughts unsaid...*, was handed down in a note. A text. Sehgal's aforementioned work, *This objective...*, has no material inscription. Apparently, Sehgal activates the work by *telling* employees and volunteers what the work is. In many ways like kids tell each other what they're going to play when they've agreed to do Moms and Dads, for example. The role of language may be less easily

traceable in works that do carry material inscriptions by the makers, such as painting or sculpture. And of course, I wondered what it was like, for example when I was working on my painting series ‘Stains: not facing reality’, or another project in which I made use of material media. An artist who works in traditional painting media agrees with him-, her- or themselves what she, he or they is going to do. The demarcation of the world of the work by self-imposed rules (or perhaps: starting points) and goals plays a role, as well as a certain narrative about the content of the work (about what is painted, even if this has no figurative reference), its form and the history of the project (what has already been done in and from the project) – and something like a *history of painting* in which one positions oneself. Just like in a game, the outcome of a work is not yet certain when the artists starts working. This outcome, the result, arises from doing it (from: playing – or, in this case: working). The artist can’t but do anything, he has to take his work seriously if he doesn’t want to let it fail and spoil it. He cannot do in this specific work what he did in that other work, he must follow the rules and narrative of this specific work: that determines what is and what is not part of that work, what can and cannot be done. If he nevertheless does something that was not allowed, an internal dialogue will start, in which he discusses with himself: is this possible, or justified, or not, and why? From the example of the practice of the game it should now be clear how something like that may work.

Knowing and Understanding, Knowledge and Meaning

I hope, I have now made it sufficiently plausible that language is ‘by definition necessary for the creation of a work of art,’ using Prof. Dr. Wesseling’s words. Language has a similar role for the functioning of the artwork after the maker has stopped working on it, especially if we accept that the artist appears in her or his work as its ‘first reader’, as Ricoeur has put it.³⁴ Here, we should understand *reader* above all in the sense of *one who reads*, that is to say:

‘To bring together a distinctive modification of meaning, reminiscent of the oldest condition of Germanic civilization: to take up and assemble the runic rods, in order to gather the meaning, to read the runes. (...) Later the same word was also applied to the written characters, although it could thereof really not be said; it is remarkable, however, that Lat. *legere* and Gk. *legein*, although etymologically unrelated, unite the two meanings – reading and gathering.’³⁵

An artist is always busy reading. From the first act in the creation of a work, the dialogue between the artists intentions, questions and interpretations, and the work as it arises, happens and shapes the following actions the artist takes. The artist is constantly busy interpreting what the work commands him to do and what it allows or prohibits. Just like the game commands its players to take it seriously. Later contemplators of the piece participate in that work (as an established piece) in much the same way, but without further adapting or changing the work: as either readers or players.

Wesseling’s intuitive, instinctive ‘knowing’ can perhaps be understood better as well from the viewpoint of child’s play. Much in such game is often implied, it is more or less ‘known’ by all participants without it explicitly being discussed or defined by its players. Especially when they’ve played together a lot, already. Often, there is a whole framework of presuppositions, rules, principles and stories implied from which players start. It is only hinted at, when a player has forgotten something and does or says something ‘wrong’.

When rethinking professor Wesseling’s intuition, I must admit that I personally don’t believe in any intuition or an inspiration that just ‘falls from the sky’, as it were, on either a playing child or a working artist. But, for the latter, I do believe that someone who has worked a lot as an artist, already has a lot of implied ‘framework’ at hand, so that it may seem – looking from the outside in – as if ‘it’ just ‘pops up’, or mysteriously ‘flew in’ what such an artist does. In addition, I feel it is often the case that those who like to talk about ‘inspiration’ or ‘intuition’ (in their own work or that of others) tend to tread the most well-trodden paths. By relying on the unnameable, or the subconscious, in my opinion people mainly rely on the most common knowledge: the most general framework that is at

hand. The framework from which those work is neither questioned nor researched – because the ‘instinct’ is supposed to ‘know’ miraculously. This way of not-thinking raises no new insights, because such supposed instinctive or intuitive ‘knowing’ is usually not described (named) and thus can’t be investigated. It is not without reason that Dr. Wesseling says as well in her essay, that ‘for the continuation of the artistic process it is necessary to understand what has happened and (try to) name it.’³⁶ However, I don’t believe artists really are so ‘dumb’, at least not the good ones. I agree with Kant in the quote cited earlier: ‘Without sense no object would be given to us, and without reason no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, perceptions without concepts are blind.’³⁷ In art (as in play) the meaning of what is done becomes ostensive. So, whatever the artist does, all the artist’s actions when doing art, are thought. What is done is approached (pre-understood) as meaningful. As Arendt has said it: “the work of art finds its origin in the human mind,” and: “works of art are things of thought.”³⁸

Thinking and speaking are indistinguishable. What is said is thought at the same time. And what is thought can be said. As Arendt says it: “thoughts ... cannot exist without being spoken.”³⁹ To be able to think about something, it first needs to be (re-)imagined. And what was imagined, needs to be said (be given form, become formulated). There is much to say for the thought, that in order to *know* something, that which is or becomes known (the *knowledge*) must be said – must be ‘put into words’. After all: thoughts unsaid are then forgotten...⁴⁰ In my chapter for *Imagination and Art* I therefore propose to approach all imaginable knowledge as imagined *formulations*. Much like play and game exists and plays through, with and in formulations. In language-use the world of the game is delineated, with its rules, aims and narrative. In my opinion, works of art should therefore be understood foremost as formulations. Not so much as a thought that is subsequently given a form (a thought that was formulated), but rather as a form that formulates thoughts (a formulation that makes other formulations possible and even needed). From the description and analysis of what the form shows, is and does, insights are formulated, which can then be named as knowledge. This is a heuristic and hermeneutical process.

To answer the question: Does art yield knowledge, we must first look again at the schism that Dr. Wesseling suggests between knowledge and meaning. When we return to the example that Arendt gives of the alleged difference between meaning (understanding) and truth (knowledge), the centaur,⁴¹ we may say truthfully that we *know* what a centaur is, even if we also *understand* that such a creature does not actually exist. Perhaps you have noticed how, in this sentence, I have mixed the concepts of knowing and understanding up with the dialectic of meaning and knowledge. We may say as well: we *understand* what a centaur is and we *know* that it does not exist. Here, knowledge appears not as either true or untrue, in the sense of actually existent (true) or inexistent (untrue). So, how does truth and knowledge relate, and how do these two concepts relate to the concept of *reality* in terms of empiricism – or, as Dr. Wesseling has formulated it: a knowledge that meets “criteria of certainty and proof?” When is knowledge certain? When is it truthful? And when is understanding true? And, if an understanding is true, does it then become knowledge? Or: if knowing that something is untrue, is such knowledge then not knowledge but rather an understanding?

I think it is fair to say that the definitions of the terms *knowledge*⁴² and *meaning*⁴³ cover a broad range of meanings, just like the term *making* was. Knowing and knowledge are not concepts that contrast with the meaning of the concepts understanding and meaning. Rather, the terms are related and overlay each other: all meaning is or can be known and all knowledge is meaningful – although the usability of it may vary in certain contexts and its certainty may well have a more provisional and argumentative character. We have learned what a centaur is, by understanding what that term refers to and thus means. Even if it is an inexistent creature, we know what it is – and in certain contexts such knowledge becomes meaningful and can be changed or complemented.

We need again return to the topic of language to grasp some of this. Instead of saying: it is meaningless to know what a centaur is in this context, we could perhaps also say: it makes no sense to

know what a centaur is *here*. But if we said that, has the knowledge of what the centaur is really become senseless? Indeed, we cannot see (sense) the centaur, except by our minds eyes. But if we described the centaur, the formulation or the sentence(s) would make *sense*. By a sensible formulation we *know* what a centaur is, even if it *is* not really, actually, or physically (there). A formulation is not senseless when it is not based upon a sensory perception. Sense and senselessness are rather related to the context in which a formulation functions, not to the formulation itself.

By writing this, I intend to make visible (at least to the mind's eye), how understanding and meaning – knowing and knowledge – sense and the senses are entangled with one another and with their linguistic or thought form: the formulation that describes and defines a certain understanding or belief. A form that makes sense through syntax and synthesis. I remind here of Kant: 'thoughts without content (i.e. meaning – TK) are empty.'⁴⁴ Again: finding meaning is a heuristic and hermeneutic process that encompasses both knowledge and understanding at once. From analysis of what the form shows, is and does (in context), new insights are formulated (syntax and synthesis), which can then be named as knowledge. Both Kant's forms of knowledge, a posteriori and a priori, are at play and are related in a meaningful manner.

Knowledge and understanding are not opposites. Vernunft (reason) and Verstand (intellect) are related in meaningful ways. Knowledge is in itself a meaning (that which is or becomes known) that needs⁴⁵ to be understood. The kinds of knowledge that are found through, with and in art, may well be of a divergent nature. The cognition science and epistemology will make clear what types of knowledge can be conceptualised. It may well be that art provides mostly a speculative knowledge, but certainly not just. Narrowing down the type of knowledge that is produced in art to a term like: understanding – and dealing with that as if it were an opposite of the type of knowledge that meets certain criteria of certainty and proof, is in my opinion not useful.⁴⁶ It makes the study and practice of art a lesser good than the exact sciences. An often quoted citation says: "Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted."⁴⁷ A speculative and argumentative knowledge is still a form of knowledge, that has its own methods to test its validity.⁴⁸

Whatever nature the knowledge acquired through art has, it comes down to what Adorno accurately said:

'What the work demands from its beholder is knowledge, and indeed knowledge that does justice to it: the work wants its truth and untruth to be grasped.'⁴⁹

Art is not a practice of 'making', in the sense of 'assembling', but art is a practice that is 'performed' or 'done' like the sciences. And like games are done. Art is a *practice*, in the sense of Alasdair MacIntyre's description:

'a coherent and complex form of socially recognized, cooperative human activity (...) by which goods intrinsic to this form of activity are realized in the course of efforts to meet standards of excellence that apply to and partly define this form of activity. As a result, not only are the human capacities to achieve excellence systematically expanded, but also human ideas about the associated ends and goods.'⁵⁰

The English term *art* comes etymologically from the Latin term for *knowledge* – encompassing 'knowledge of' and 'knowing how' at once.⁵¹ I propose to stay with that origin: the arts⁵² were and are a domain of knowledge acquisition. Knowledge, of a diverse nature, in which knowing and understanding become related in a meaningful way. A practice through, with and in which, people can learn and understand what is there in the world and how to be in the world themselves (what is that, what does that mean?). Moreover, a practice by which people are able to gain a *world*, rather than just be in a specific situation. A way to *make* (!) the earth into a home, rather than a place where one is just trying to get by.

Notes

- ¹ Stephan Enter, *Pastorale* (deel: Twee), Van Oorschot, Amsterdam, 2019, p. 107 (translated from Dutch by myself. All translations of the Dutch publications and translations cited are my own, unless otherwise indicated).
- ² Hannah Arendt, *Het Leven van de Geest*, Ten Have, Utrecht, 2020, p. 37.
- ³ The relation between meaning and (ontological) being is meaningful and interesting. In 'Codex Hortus Conclusus' (Ton Kruse, 2019) Gerard Visser wrote after citing a poem by Chris van Geel: "The poem says that every tree is a slightly different 'open mouth of the wind'. Assuming that this 'is' is not synonymous with 'appears', does then not the image break through the opposition of actual and imaginary? Doesn't it touch on the ground experience of the East that the only real thing about the tree is its emptiness, which takes shape in its relationships?" (pages in this work are not numbered, as it is not a book in a common sense, but rather a graphic work of (visual) art) What a thing or a case 'is' becomes that by what it 'means', which is defined by its relationships.
- ⁴ Arendt, cited work, p. 144
- ⁵ Arendt, cited work, p. 143
- ⁶ Perhaps interesting, later on in this paper I will return to this thought, is the difference that Arendt makes between 'meaning' and 'truth'. She takes the example of the word 'centaur' after Aristotle, which is meaningful (we can know/understand what that word means/refers to) but is not something true or untrue, unless in the context of being and non-being. But equally interesting is, that we can say we 'know' what a centaur 'is', while we also know that such a creature does not actually exist. What interests me, is that we may use the term and concept of knowing in alternation with the term and concept of understanding. The empirical or physical 'thing' seems interchangeable with the thought-thing, without it ever being a problem that it is not 'really there' in a physical sense.
- ⁷ *Denken in Kunst*, editors P. Sonderen & H Borgdorff, Leiden University Press, Leiden, 2012
- ⁸ Janneke Wesseling, *Hoe Denkt een Kunstenaar*, Theorie en Reflectie in het Kunstonderwijs, in: *Denken in Kunst*, LUP, Leiden, 2012, p. 39: "To create a work of art, an object that has expressiveness, it is necessary that the student learns to connect the two worlds of thinking and acting."
- ⁹ A description of this piece may be found here: <https://walkerart.org/collections/artworks/this-objective-of-that-object> (14-09-2021)
- ¹⁰ Ader did this piece originally in 1973, for a seven day exhibition at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax. See: https://issuu.com/galeriewest/docs/west_david_horvitz_09_2010 (14-09-2021)
- ¹¹ Here I want to remember a diary notation by Hugo Ball, dated: Bern, 7-9-1917: "It seems to me that thinking can also be an art, and in that sense, it is subject to the laws of art: namely, by focusing our attention on distinguishing certain thoughts and series of thoughts; by drawing boundaries and giving space and content only to certain perceptions and by avoiding others. ... As in the other arts, in thinking it is decisive what you have left out and have not mentioned, for in what way you have distinguished yourself." (Hugo Ball, *Vlucht uit de Tijd*, Vantilt, Nijmegen, 2016, p. 195)
- ¹² Wesseling, *Hoe denkt een kunstenaar*, p. 40: "Awareness of the interaction between making and thinking does not mean that the interaction can also be fully described. Just like all layers of meaning of a work of art cannot be expressed in language. After all, if that were the case, the artwork would be superfluous. (...) Also, language is not by definition necessary for the creation of a work of art. It is possible that a work of art is created intuitively, almost unconsciously, and that it immediately hits the mark. Nevertheless, or perhaps just then, there is for the continuation of the artistic process the need remains to understand what has happened and to (try to) name it."
- ¹³ The *Middelnederlandsch Dictionary* describes the vocabulary of Middle Dutch; the Dutch that was spoken from about 1250 to 1550 in the area that roughly coincides with the present Netherlands and Flanders. The first nine parts are written by Dr. Eelco Verwijs and Dr. Jakob Verdam. Prof. Willem De Vreese and G.I. Liefstinck edited the Building materials or source list (MNW part 10), Dr. Anton Beekman expanded the series with an eleventh part about the waters of the Netherlands. The first part of the dictionary was published in 1885 and the last volume in 1941.
- ¹⁴ The *Dictionary of the Dutch Language* (WNT) describes the meaning and history of hundreds of thousands words from written Dutch from 1500 to 1976. In 1851 Matthias de Vries presented his design for a 'complete Dutch linguistic dictionary'. Since then, five generations of editors have worked on the WNT for almost a century and a half. When it was completed in 1998, it consisted of a whopping 40 fat bindings.

- ¹⁵ This is perhaps a Dutch saying that can't be translated properly to English without loosing the term 'act'.
- ¹⁶ With this term and concept Wesseling seems to refer to the psychological theories of Sigmund Freud from the beginnings of the twentieth century.
- ¹⁷ See footnote 10.
- ¹⁸ 'Pure psychological automatism with which one intends to, in word and writing or in any other way, express the real mode of functioning of thought. Dictation of thought, without control of reason, in any form, free from aesthetic or ethical bias.' p. 303 André Breton, *The surrealist manifesto* (1924) in Dutch translation by F. Drijckoningen & J. Fontijn, *Historische avant garde, Huis aan de drie grachten*, Amsterdam, 1986.
- ¹⁹ Here the translation of the Dutch term 'inzien' becomes sensitive: as in Dutch the term is a literal combination of the words 'in' and 'seen' – I chose to translate that into 'see through' with the connotation of the term 'penetration', as these say together that an insight is about seeing through a case or thing, and doing so with a deep comprehension of the case or thing.
- ²⁰ P.A.F. van Veen en N. van der Sijs, *Etimologisch woordenboek: de herkomst van onze woorden*, Van Dale Lexicografie, Utrecht/Antwerpen, 1997.
- ²¹ Wesseling, *Hoe denkt een kunstenaar*, p. 41: "The claim that art also produces knowledge remains a hollow phrase when it is impossible to explain what this kind of knowledge is and how it is produced. I think it is better to focus on the differences in the way of thinking of artists and scientists, than on the similarities. The question that must be asked is not so much 'what do artists know?', but 'How do artists think?'. The verb 'knowing' leads us in the wrong direction (...). What is the meaning of words such as knowing, knowledge and thinking? Hannah Arendt discusses this in the first part of her book *The Life of the Mind*, entitled *Thinking*. Here she elaborates on Kant's distinction between two ways of thinking, *Vernunft* and *Verstand*. Arendt translates these as respectively: reason and intellect. The distinction between the two, which can respectively be translated in Dutch as 'begrip' (understanding) and 'verstand' (intelligence), coincides, in her opinion, with the distinction between meaning and cognition or knowledge. (...) Understanding transcends (...) the limitations of cognition, namely the criteria of certainty and proof. In the words of Arendt: '*The need for reason is not inspired by the quest for truth but by the quest for meaning. And meaning and truth are not the same.*'"
- ²² Immanuel Kant, *Kritiek der Reinen Vernunft*, 3, 75 – as cited on: <https://webapp.fkt.uvt.nl/gfo/default/index/kani-lk5> 23.09.2021.
- ²³ Wesseling, *Hoe denkt een kunstenaar*, p. 41.
- ²⁴ For instance, Freud's theory of the subconscious, the ego and the super-ego, is perhaps speculative, but does provide an insightful image of how feelings, behaviour and thought interact and what it may mean for a human being, to be a cultural animal.
- ²⁵ Ton Kruse, *Imagination in Games: Formulation, Re-actualization and gaining a World*, In: *Imagination and Art, Explorations in Contemporary Theory*, editors Keith Moser and Ananta Ch. Sukla, Brill, Leiden, 2020.
- ²⁶ Kruse, *Imagination in Games*, p. 656.
- ²⁷ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Vantilt, Nijmegen, 2014, p. 111.
- ²⁸ Paragraph 'Games: Experience and Language', Ton Kruse, Ch. 27, *Imagination in Art*, Brill, Leiden, 2020 – on p. 653 of that paragraph, I quote Gadamer (*Truth and Method*, Vantilt, Nijmegen, 2014, p. 464): "Speaking is ... never merely sharing the singular under general terms. In the use of words the visual given is not made available as a separate case of something general, but it has become present in the saying itself ... How the importance of the things that we encounter in understanding, is played out, is itself a linguistic process, so to speak: a game with words that spell out the intended meaning ... This is not about a game with language or with what appeals to us in the experience ... but about the game of language itself, which appeals to us, makes proposals and withdrawals, asks and finds its fulfillment in the answer itself."
- ²⁹ Kruse, *Imagination in Games*, p. 652.
- ³⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Tekst en Betekenis*, Opstellen over de interpretatie van teksten, Ambo, Baarn, 1991, p. 74: "Each language-use is actualized as an event, but is understood as a meaning."
- ³¹ Ricoeur, *Tekst en Betekenis*, p. 83.
- ³² Ricoeur, *Tekst en Betekenis*, p. 99.
- ³³ Ricoeur, *Tekst en Betekenis*, p. 99.
- ³⁴ Ricoeur, *Tekst en Betekenis*, p. 112.
- ³⁵ Middelnederlandsch Dictionary, see footnote 11, 'lezen' (reading). In the Dictionary of the Dutch Language (WNT) 'lezen' (reading) is described as follows: 'Collect, gather (...) to sort out, from a multitude or a quantity. (...) To sort out, to shift, to clean. (...) Of that which is written or printed (or can be equated with scripture). To survey the letters (or other characters) and convert them into words, whether spoken or

merely thought. (...) To comprehend something, understand something, from what one reads. (...) It is expressed by a fig. relation (...) that one perceives something in any way, comes to know it, notice it.'

³⁶ See footnote 10.

³⁷ See footnote 19.

³⁸ , Hannah Arendt, *De Menselijke Conditie*, Boom, Amsterdam, 2009, p. 152 & p. 153.

³⁹ See footnote 4.

⁴⁰ Here, I refer again to Bas Jan Ader's 'Thoughts Unsaid Then Forgotten' 1973, see footnote 10.

⁴¹ See footnote 6.

⁴² The term knowledge is described as follows on the online dictionary of Merriam-Webster: 1. a(1): the fact or condition of knowing something with familiarity gained through experience or association; a(2): acquaintance with or understanding of a science, art, or technique; b(1): the fact or condition of being aware of something; b(2): the range of one's information or understanding answered to the best of my knowledge; c: the circumstance or condition of apprehending truth or fact through reasoning : cognition; d: the fact or condition of having information or of being learned; 2. a: the sum of what is known : the body of truth, information, and principles acquired by humankind; b archaic: a branch of learning; 3. archaic: sexual intercourse.

⁴³ The online dictionary of Merriam-Webster describes the term meaning as follows: 1. a: the thing one intends to convey, especially by language: purport; b: the thing that is conveyed, especially by language: import; 2. something meant or intended: aim; 3. significant quality, especially: implication of a hidden or special significance; 4. a: the logical connotation of a word or phrase; b: the logical denotation or extension of a word or phrase.

⁴⁴ See footnote 22.

⁴⁵ Asks, wants, needs, demands – it can be interesting to think through the connotations of the used verb.

⁴⁶ Relevant for this supposed dichotomy of reason and intellect, of the arts and the natural sciences, is also Martin Heidegger's essay 'The Thing' (Martin Heidegger, *Over denken, bouwen, wonen*, SUN, Nijmegen, 1999): "The ... coercive knowledge of the sciences has already destroyed things as such, long before the atomic bomb exploded. Its detonation is but the grossest of all gross affirmations of the destruction of the thing that happened already long ago: of the fact that the thing remains void as a thing. The thingness of the thing remains hidden, forgotten. Its essence does not appear, that is, come to speak. ... The destruction is therefore so ominous, because it entails a twofold blindness: on the one hand, the view that before every other experience science grasps the real in its reality; on the other, the illusion that, irrespective of the scientific investigation of the real, things could still be things, which presupposes that in every respect they have always been things unfolding their being as such. If, however, things had already manifested themselves as things in their thingness, the thingness of the thing would have been manifested. It would have become known in thought." Heidegger formulates in this essay the insight that knowing what things are, only comes to *speak in thought*, but is ostensive in experience – as a gift that collects a range of meaningful relations. Elaborating Heidegger's argumentation further in this paper, would make things needlessly complex.

⁴⁷ William Bruce Cameron, *Informal Sociology*, a casual introduction to sociological thinking, Random House, New York, 1963, p. 13.

⁴⁸ As Ricoeur says (Ricoeur, *Tekst en Betekenis*, p. 139), criteria of relative superiority can easily be derived from the logic of subjective probability.

⁴⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, 1997, p. 19.

⁵⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana, 2007, p. 187.

⁵¹ Latin noun, *ars*: method, way; science, knowledge; skill.

⁵² This term may refer to the Liberal Arts as well.

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The Autonomy of Interpretation

THIJS LIJSTER

Introduction

How does a work of art relate to its interpretations, and vice versa? This has been a long and ongoing debate in the history of art, aesthetics and hermeneutics. But while traditional discussions revolved primarily around the true intentions of the author (whether it be God or Aristotle), twentieth-century philosophy and literary criticism has left us with the question of the *autonomy* of both the work *and* of the interpretation. Semiotician Umberto Eco, in a book published in 1962, famously spoke of the 'open work' (Eco 1989), the work which is fragmentary and deliberately left unfinished by the artist, so that the work of the interpreter is needed in order to complete it. Going one step further, Roland Barthes in an even more famous essay from 1967 proclaimed the 'death of the author', arguing that the author (or artist in any other discipline) cannot claim, or be granted, any *authority* over the meaning of the work. The death of the author, Barthes wrote, marks the birth of the reader; in other words, it puts the authority over the meaning of the work in the hands of its (many) interpreters.

Where does this leave the work of art itself? Does it become a mere screen for the interpreter to project any meaning on, however they please? Where is meaning located, or where does it happen? Certainly, the work must have part in what this meaning entails? Here we are faced with an interesting tension regarding the autonomy of the work of art vis-à-vis its interpretations (and vice versa), which has determined debates on interpretation ever since. On the one extreme, we find the position that sees in interpretation a threat to the artwork's integrity and autonomy. This is a position that was most forcefully and polemically voiced in Susan Sontag's essay *Against Interpretation*, where she writes:

Like the fumes of the automobile and of heavy industry which befoul the urban atmosphere, the effusion of interpretations of art today poisons our sensibilities. In a culture whose already classical dilemma is the hypertrophy of the intellect at the expense of energy and sensual capability, interpretation is the revenge of the intellect upon art. Even more. It is the revenge of the intellect upon the world. To interpret is to impoverish, to deplete the world – in order to set up a shadow world of 'meanings.' (Sontag 2009, 7)

On the other side of the spectrum, we would find the position denying the autonomy of the work. Hans-Georg Gadamer, for instance, argues that it is the interpreter who first establishes what he calls the 'hermeneutic identity' of the work: "To understand something, I must be able to identify it. [...] I identify something as it was or as it is, and this identity alone constitutes the meaning of the work" (Gadamer 1986, 25).

In this article, I want to take up this issue, and the question to what extent the work of art can be said to be autonomous if interpretation plays a crucial part in constituting it. I want to argue that both the work of art and its interpretation are autonomous not despite, but *because* of the fact that they constitute one another. To do so, I will first draw on Immanuel Kant and Theodor W. Adorno in order to argue that aesthetic autonomy is precisely what both problematizes and necessitates interpretation. Next, I will discuss how Georg Bertram considers discursive interpretation (or criticism) as one among many *interpretative practices* relating to the work of art. This broadened understanding

of interpretation will allow us consider both the relation of the work with its interpretations, and the concept of aesthetic autonomy, in a new light.

1. The Impossibility of Interpretation

Adorno, in *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), described the aporia that lies in the heart of interpretation, and thus in a way already alluded to the issue discussed in the introduction: “The afterlife of artworks, their reception as an aspect of their own history, transpires between a do-not-let-yourself-be-understood and a wanting-to-be-understood” (Adorno 2004, 384). In other words, on the one hand works of art resist understanding, on the other hand they make a constant appeal to our understanding, they want or even demand to be understood. Under this condition, and in this way, interpretation of artworks can be said to be both impossible and necessary.

Why is this so, and where does this aporia come from? Let us start by analytically distinguishing the question of the impossibility of understanding from the question of the necessity of understanding (although both are closely related to the idea of aesthetic autonomy), and divide these questions over Kant and Adorno. With regard to the first, we can already recognize an explanation of this impossibility in Kant’s analysis of the aesthetic judgment, which he considers to be a judgment that is “without a concept” (Kant 1987, 64). Without a concept implies that I do not have to know what a thing is or supposed to be or do – or in Kant’s terms what its ‘purpose’ is – in order to make an aesthetic judgment. Kant uses the example of the flower: to enjoy its beauty, I do not have to be a botanist, that is, I do not have to know that the flower is in fact the reproductive organ of the plant (i.e. I don’t have to know the flower’s purpose).

In the case of fine arts, one could argue that knowing the purpose of the thing can get in the way of aesthetic enjoyment, which is why Kant argues that “fine art must have the *look* of nature even though we are conscious of it as art” (Kant 1987, 174). By this he does not mean that art should imitate nature, but rather that it must have the same sense of spontaneity that natural beauties have. Once we become aware that a thing is intentionally produced *in order to* please us or to move us, and of the ways through which the artist *wanted* to produce such an effect in us, a work of art can quickly turn into kitsch. In other words, even if a work of art is produced with the intention to aesthetically please us, or to produce in us some kind of idea, it should not *betray* this intention or purpose, according to Kant.

That the aesthetic judgment is ‘without a concept’ is not to say that understanding plays no part in it. On the contrary, Kant famously described aesthetic enjoyment as the ‘free play’ of the cognitive faculties. What characterizes the aesthetic judgment and sets it apart from logical judgments is that, indeed, we are faced with a presentation (or in Pluhar’s translation an ‘intuition’) (*Anschauung*) for which no concept is given, but which for that very reason provokes the power of understanding. It is, in Kant’s terms a “sensation of both the imagination in its *freedom* and the understanding in its *lawfulness*, as they reciprocally quicken each other” (Kant 1987, 151). It is, in other words, precisely through its ‘conceptlessness’ that the aesthetic object stimulates our mind, and holds our attention. “We linger in our contemplation of the beautiful”, Kant writes elsewhere in the *Critique of Judgment*, “because this contemplation reinforces and reproduces itself.” (Kant 1987, 68)

Now although Kant is often thought to deal with the fine arts with a rather formalist approach, he does have interesting things to say about hermeneutics, too. That his aesthetic theory is concerned with the interpretation of artworks becomes clear once we look at his conception of ‘aesthetic ideas’. In §49 of the *Critique of Judgment* he defines the aesthetic idea, in line with his analysis of the aesthetic judgment, as “a presentation of the imagination *which prompts much thought, but to which no determinate thought whatsoever, i.e. no [determinate] concept, can be adequate*, so that no language can express it completely and allow us to grasp it” (Kant 1987, 182, emphasis mine). He proceeds by saying that the aesthetic idea is the counterpart of the rational idea (which he had explained in the *Critique of Pure Reason*): whereas in a rational idea, no intuition is adequate to express a concept of reason (e.g., God, the soul, and the totality of nature), in the case of aesthetic ideas no concept of the

understanding is adequate for the presentations of the imagination. We might, of course, give words to express our aesthetic experience, or to convey what we sense the artwork means. For example, we might say that Shakespeare's *Othello* is about jealousy and its destructive effects, or we might say that Van Gogh's painting of a pair of shoes calls to mind the labor performed by the one who wore them, thus providing a sense of dignity to such a mundane object. At the same time, though, we realize that such words fall short, and will always fall short, of catching the meaning of the work; indeed, as Kant says, no determinate thought whatsoever can be adequate.¹ Which is why the meaning of the work will produce ever new thoughts and associations that keep the mind going, and exceed the interpretation that is given.

No concept or set of concepts could grasp the numerous thoughts and association provoked by the work; if that were the case it would not continue to fascinate us, to prompt thought. Kirk Pillow, in his account of Kant, therefore characterizes the aesthetic idea as "the spur to an open-ended exploration of meaning and significance" (Pillow 1994, 453). Importantly for our present purposes, for Pillow these aesthetic ideas do not merely play a role in the production of fine art by the 'genius' (the context in which Kant mainly discusses them), but also in the interpretation works of art: our experience of the work produces an 'excess' of thought in the recipient, thereby exceeding the boundaries of his conceptual understanding and producing in his mind the aesthetic idea.

This already points to the necessity of interpretation, namely that works of art, as Adorno put it, *want* to be understood.

2. The Necessity of Interpretation

In the aesthetic experience, Kant suggests, our desire to identify what a thing is (its concept) or what it is for (its purpose) is both constantly stimulated *and* frustrated, so that we are inclined to continue to contemplate its presentation to our senses, what Kant calls the *Anschauung*. It is not surprising then, that twentieth-century artists and theorists (from Greenberg to Adorno) returned to Kant to discuss tendencies in modernist art, like abstraction and minimalism. Modernist works, after all, often did not aim to represent anything 'outside' the work, but in many cases rather just *were*; namely configurations of colors and lines, or musical sounds, or objects in space. As the American minimalist artist Frank Stella once said about his own work: "*What you see is what you see*".

Susan Sontag, in her already mentioned essay, suggested that abstraction was a response and even a resistance to interpretation: "Abstract painting is the attempt to have, in the ordinary sense, no content; since there is no content, there can be no interpretation. Pop Art works by the opposite means to the same result; using a content so blatant, so 'what it is,' it, too, ends by being uninterpretable." (Sontag 2009, 10) But although her intuition that these works 'resist' interpretation might be correct, her statement that there 'can be no interpretation' must be wrong, since it ignores the paradox that we alluded to, namely that the resistance rather provokes the interpretation. Stella and Sontag suggest some kind of self-evidence or transparency, while in fact 'seeing what you see' or just being 'what it is' rather makes such objects particularly enigmatic, in a way that regular objects are not. Of a regular object one could say: 'that is a corkscrew', or 'that is a signpost'. We recognize them and know what they are, and they clearly refer to a certain context of meaning or use (what Kant calls a 'purpose', or what Martin Heidegger would call a *Zusammenhang*, a coherence of the corkscrew, together with the cork, the wine bottle, the glass, etc. within a context of use). But the same does not apply to a sculpture by, for instance, Sol Lewitt. Confronted with such an object, we ask: what is this, what are you for, why do you look like you do, and *what do you mean*. Or perhaps even: is this art? This is even (or particularly) the case when we *are* dealing with an 'ordinary' object in an artistic context: we might identify it as, let's say, a pissoir or a soup can, but this raises the question of what it is doing *there*. Works of art (modern works in particular but I would argue works in general) have, in Georg Bertram's words, a 'flawed self-evidence' (*mangelnden Selbstverständlichkeit*), by which he does not mean that art suffers some lack or flaw but rather that works of art necessarily prompt questions, thoughts, and ideas (Bertram 2005, 19).

This is also what Adorno meant when he wrote the following about the ‘reity’ (*Dinghaftigkeit*) of the artwork:

Artworks are things that tend to slough off their reity. However, in artworks the aesthetic is not superimposed on the thing in such a fashion that, given a solid foundation, their spirit could emerge. Essential to artworks is that their thingly structure, by virtue of its constitution, makes them into what is not a thing; their reity is the medium of their own transcendence. (Adorno 2004, 357)

Works of art make an appeal to our understanding then, not *despite* the fact that they are mere things, but precisely because of it. A work of art, for Adorno, refers to and emphasizes its own ‘thingliness’, and thus constitutes a thing that is, or at least claims to be, meaningful and valuable in itself, and not because it is an exemplar of a category of objects or because we can somehow use it. Thus, it shows an excess of meaning that is actually part of the natural world as a whole, and that Adorno calls the ‘more’.² Hence, the work of art is what Hegel called a ‘sensuous particular’, in the sense that it is a unique thing that does not resemble anything else, but as such is also pointing beyond itself: it is an embodiment of the *promise* of sensuous particularity (or non-identity), the irreducibility of sensuous experience to an overarching structure or schema of thought. Jay Bernstein, with a Kantian formulation, referred to this ‘more’ or this ‘beyond’ as a form of ‘meaningfulness without meaning’ (Bernstein 2006, 59). In other words, we sense that we are, as it were, spoken to, i.e. that an appeal to our understanding is made – an appeal that is also mentioned by poets such as Baudelaire and Rilke.³ However, we cannot determine exactly what this meaning is, nor will we be able to fully put it into words.

As said, this is an experience that could in principle be possible in encounters with any kind of object, but according to Adorno, in a world dominated by instrumental reason and ‘identity thinking’, art is the only realm where such an experience is still possible: “Artworks are plenipotentiaries of things that are no longer distorted by exchange, profit, and the false needs of a degraded humanity” (Adorno 2004, 298). Precisely because the work of art not only is a sensuous particular but also embodies the promise of sensuous particularity, it points to the meaning that objects have of their own, beyond exchange, use, or categorization. This ‘excess’ of meaning (or the ‘more’) makes an appeal to our understanding, to interpretation, and *not interpreting* the work of art (i.e. ignoring the appeal) would mean degrading it to the status of an object of use. Adorno writes: “Artworks [...] await their interpretation. The claim that there is nothing to interpret in them, that they simply exist, would erase the demarcation between art and nonart” (Adorno 2004, 169). Or, as he puts it elsewhere in *Aesthetic Theory*, with a wink to the opening line of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*: “[Art] is an entity that is not identical with its empiria. What is essential to art is that which in it is not the case” (*was an ihr nicht der Fall ist*) (Adorno 2004, 426).

From this it follows that interpretation is absolutely necessary. Not only because we, as it were, cannot help ourselves in attributing meaning to a work, as was already implied in the Kantian concept of the ‘aesthetic idea’. It is also necessary for the work itself, to actually exist *qua* work of art in the first place. For Adorno, this entails that the work of art, as already said, cannot be reduced to its ‘thingliness’ or ‘reity’, but is a ‘process of becoming’ in the ears, eyes and minds of its recipient.⁴ Through interpretation, works of art keep on developing or ‘unfolding’ (*Entfaltung*), long after the artist has finished them. This concept of interpretation, however, also implies that the ‘crystallization’ of interpretation is never definite, since the process-character of the work depends on constant reinterpretation.⁵

If we now again look at interpretation through the lens of the concept of autonomy, we return to the paradox already mentioned in the introduction. On the one hand, the work of art is autonomous in the meaning it conveys, which cannot in any way be ‘translated’ into some other form without damaging the integrity of both the artwork and its meaning (if that distinction even makes sense in the first place). On the other hand, however, the work of art is dependent on being experienced, and on interpretation to grant this experience meaning and significance, lest it be an ‘ordinary’ object. However, we can now see that this is not so much a contradiction but that the impossibility and the necessity of interpretations are two sides of the same coin. Exactly because the work of art is autono-

mous, in the sense that it is irreducible to some concept or context of use, it is at the same time 'relational', pointing beyond itself in its meaning, and allowing for a variety of different interpretations, which in turn develop a distinct level of independence from the work of art that they are attempting to understand.

Now that we have established the dialectical relationship between the autonomy of the work of art and the autonomy of interpretation, let us take a closer look at the practice of interpretation, and at what the above reflections imply for that practice.

3. The Practice of Interpretation

How does the interpreter deal with the 'excess' of meaning of the work; how can they find meaning in a thing that both demands and resists to be understood? How does the work *work* upon its interpreter, while at the same time remaining autonomous from any definite meaning? Adorno, in *Aesthetic Theory*, writes: "If artworks do not make themselves like something else but only like themselves, then only those who imitate them understand them." (Adorno 2004, 166). Likewise, in his essay 'Presuppositions' (1961) (from *Notes to Literature*) he argues that interpretation is a *mimetic* activity, in that the beholder or interpreter tries to 'follow', the work where it takes them. He writes:

One does not understand a work of art when one translates it into concepts [...] but rather when one is immersed in its immanent movement; I should almost say, when it is recomposed by the ear in accordance with its own logic, repainted by the eye, when the linguistic sensorium speaks along with it. (Adorno 2019, 366)

This calls to mind the anecdote about the pianist who was asked, after playing a sonata, what the piece meant, after which he took place behind the piano and started playing it again. As persuasive as this anecdote might be, it contradicts that we in fact *do* attempt to give words to our aesthetic experiences, 'translate it into concepts', and we even established that there is a need and necessity to do so. Furthermore, the 'mimesis' Adorno is talking about is not, as I take it, an exact copying of the work, but rather a form of 'resembling' and indeed 'following' (*Nachvollziehen*). Elsewhere in *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno also writes: "The mimesis of artworks is their resemblance to themselves" (Adorno 2004, 137). The phrase 'resemblance to themselves' (just as the formulation of the work being 'like itself' in the earlier quote) already suggests that the work of art does not completely coincide with itself (which precisely refers to the 'excess' of meaning the work has vis-à-vis its 'thingliness')⁶, which in turn means that the second performance the pianist in the anecdote gives is indeed already an 'interpretation' of the first one, or in any case both are different interpretation of the same sonata.

Here I think it might be useful to take a step back, and consider the broader concept of interpretation as a set of specific practices that we encounter in Georg Bertram's book *Art as Human Practice* (2019). There are three aspects that are particularly relevant about Bertram's account for our present purposes, and that I will elaborate on in what follows. First, the fact that he focuses on the activity, rather than on the ontology, of art, whereby he understands interpretative activity as "a practice that articulates the structure of the artwork by retracing the way elements are configured in it" (Bertram 2019, 130). Second, the fact that Bertram does not see interpretation in the narrow sense of an exclusively linguistic (conceptual) activity, but rather considers that concept of interpretation as merely one type amongst a variety of interpretative practices. Nor does he privilege that form of interpretation. Third, the fact that he emphasizes the *autonomy* of the interpretative praxis vis-à-vis the work of art, even though the latter constitutes this praxis.

The first aspect, though closely related to the third, deserves separate mention, since it views interpretation through the lens of Bertram's entire project, namely of understanding art as a particular type of human praxis, which however should not be considered in isolation of other human activities. Bertram criticizes what he calls the 'autonomy-paradigm' (e.g. the theories of Christoph Menke and Arthur C. Danto) that emphasizes the specificity of art or the aesthetic experience, but

by consequence is unable to determine the value of art or aesthetics within human life. This is not the place to discuss Bertram's aesthetics in its entirety, but it does already hint to the way he considers the relation between art and interpretation, namely as practices that mutually constitute one another. He uses the term 'challenge' (*Herausforderung*) to explain the dialogic character of that relation, an explanation that is worthwhile to quote at length:

In employing the notion of a challenge to explain the dynamic relation of an artwork to the practices of recipients, it is to demonstrate that the constitution of artworks is inextricably bound up with these practices. The artwork's structure only shows itself to be challenging by being taken up by the recipient. [...] Even the dynamic process that emerges from artworks thus has two sides: on the one hand, the self-relational constitution of the artwork, and on the other hand, the activities that recipients carry out in dealing with the artwork. We cannot understand either of these two aspects independently of the other. The self-related constitution is arranged around activities that recipients unfold, and these activities are arranged around the self-related constitution. Artworks are thus bound up with activities that they call forth. (Bertram 2019, 128)

The activities Bertram is thinking of, as already mentioned, exceed merely linguistic or conceptual forms of interpretation (such as art criticism, art history, etc.). He distinguishes between four types, namely bodily, perceptive, emotional, and symbolic practices of interpretation. An example of 'bodily' interpretation would be dancing, or tapping one's fingers or foot, when hearing music, or walking around a sculpture in order to be able to view from different angles or to get a sense of its magnitude. Perceptive interpretation refers to particular types of seeing or hearing that a work might require; for instance, the way a film or painting can 'steer' our gaze, or it refers to the fact that it requires a trained ear to discern a particular line in a polyphonous piece of music. Emotional practices refer to the challenge the artwork poses to be emotionally engaged with, for instance, the hero of a story, or to be saddened or frightened by a work of art. Symbolic articulations, finally, refer to interpretation in the narrow sense discussed up until now, that is linguistic practices in the field of art criticism, history and theory, but it could also include artistic practices, for instance interpreting a novel when making a film adaption of it. The latter example calls into mind the critic A.O. Scott's reversal of Flaubert's (in)famous remark that every critic is a failed artist: "It would be too much to say that every artist is a failed critic, unable to appreciate what already exists without adding to it, but it does not seem to me inaccurate to say that all art is successful criticism" (Scott 2016, 22).

The gain in considering interpretation in its full breadth, including, besides thinking and writing, a variety of practices ranging from listening and seeing to dancing and laughing, is twofold. In the first place, interpretation has often been understood in a purely cognitive, which also often meant a distanced or detached, way. By widening our understanding of interpretation, we can see that interpretation, in all its various forms, is not detached but rather in a close relation with the work. We can here again think of the example of dancing, as a form of bodily interpretation: when we dance to music, our movements are constituted by the music, by its rhythm or mood. I already emphasized this when I referred to Adorno's notion of interpretation as mimesis. In Adorno's aesthetics, however, this goes to the point of a complete submission of the interpreter to the work, for instance where he writes the following:

The spectator must not project what transpires in himself on to the artwork in order to find himself conformed, uplifted, and satisfied in it, but must, on the contrary, relinquish himself to the artwork, assimilate himself to it, and fulfill the work in its own terms. In other words, he must submit to the discipline of the work rather than demand that the artwork give him something. (Adorno 2004, 355)

At the same time, however, it is clear that our bodies are not fully or literally controlled by the music. Despite what Grace Jones sang, we are not *slaves* to the rhythm. Rather, we *orient* our movements to the music, as Bertram puts it, and attempt to *articulate* the music through our bodies in a particular way.⁷ By consequence, the dance is a praxis that has a level of independence in relation to the music.

We can now ‘translate’ this broad understanding of interpretation back to the concept of interpretation (in the narrow sense) that we started with. Interpretation, understood in the narrow sense as criticism, assigning meaning to a work of art using conceptual language, is then one among a variety of interpretative praxes. Like other practices (such as dance, listening, or laughing) we can conceive of it as a particular form of articulation, a response to the challenge that the work of art poses. This means that interpretation is indeed steered by the ‘dynamic process’ emerging from the work – the work does not just lie passively waiting for us to project some meaning onto it – but at the same time the *act* of interpretation depends on the receptivity and creativity of the interpreter, indeed much like is the case for a dance performance.

This brings us to the third aspect of Bertram’s conception of interpretation, which refers to the way he understands aesthetic autonomy. For Bertram, autonomy refers, firstly, to the self-referentiality of the work of art, i.e. that a work makes reference and raises attention to its own materiality, in order to generate meaning (what with Adorno we called the ‘thingliness’ of the work of art). This meaning, however, is not fixed, but part of what he calls a dynamic process. He writes:

[A]n artwork is a structure that is constituted in a self-referential way, and from this a dynamic emerges that is open for constant further development. These further developments occur in and through the way in which those who deal with artworks articulate them. Thus, an artwork is connected with the practices that it provokes among those who deal with it, which entails that these practices are always subject to further refinement and do not come to an end point. (Bertram 2019, 141–142)

This implies that autonomy, in this context, does not mean that artistic and interpretative practices are isolated from one another. Quite the contrary, since as already discussed, they constitute each other: the dance is ‘provoked’ by the music, and the music is articulated by the dance. In line with Gadamer’s notion of *Wirkungsgeschichte* (historically effected consciousness), a work of art changes throughout history and under the influence of the interpretations given to it, and the way we perceive and understand a work is (consciously or unconsciously) influenced by previous interpretations. Our understanding of a play by Sophocles, for instance, will be mediated through the Christian tradition, through translations into our mother tongue, through the interpretations of Hegel and Freud, or through different the different adaptations for the stage or the screen that have existed. But while autonomy does not entail isolation, it does mean that each interpretative praxis has an independence (*Eigenständigkeit*) vis-à-vis both the work that it articulates, and vis-à-vis other possible interpretations. Simply put, and keeping in mind Bertram’s broad understanding of interpretative praxes: dancing to music is not the same as listening to music, and even two people dancing will not move in exactly the same way. The autonomy of the interpretative praxis then means that each interpretation is an activity in its own right, not entirely determined by the work of art. In any interpretative praxis the recipient’s own productivity and creativity plays an essential part.

4. Conclusion: The Value of Interpretation

We started with a paradox of interpretation, and now end with what we might call a dual dialectic. In the first place, through a discussion of Kant and Adorno I argued that it is precisely the conceptlessness of art that provokes the need (on the side of the artwork) and the desire (on the side of the interpreter) of interpretation. Adorno once compared art to the ‘purloined letter’ from Edgar Allan Poe’s story, which is at once visible and hidden, or rather is hidden *because* it is clearly visible. A work of art can only be understood in and on its own terms, since it is a thing that has no clear purpose and does not fit in any existing cognitive schema. Works of art refer to, question, and reflect on their own being, their own materiality, and to that extent express an excess of meaning, beyond both their own ‘thingliness’ and beyond the comprehension of the recipient. This is what Adorno calls the ‘enigmatic character’ (*Rätselcharakter*) of the work of art. But precisely because the work of art is enigmatic, there is the need for interpretation, even if it that means that it is, in Adorno’s words, “their incomprehensibility that needs to be comprehended” (Adorno 2004, 157).

However, in our attempt to articulate meaning – an attempt that never fully and definitely succeeds – we also gain meanings that can cast a new and different light on the world, and on our own lives. This is the second dialectic, that refers to the autonomy of interpretative practices as particular articulations of the work. An understanding of autonomy that, following Bertram, consists precisely in acknowledging and underlining the continuity between artistic and interpretative activities, as well as the continuity between these practices and other forms of human praxis. When dealing with art, i.e. when interpreting, in any of its various forms, a work of art, we engage in practices that have significance beyond the realm of art. Bertram writes that “other practices in the world come to be *permeated* by those interpretive activities that relate to the artwork” (Bertram 2019, 148, emphasis mine). As we connect other practices (bodily, perceptive, emotional and symbolic) to our interpretative practices, we tend to renegotiate these other practices, redefining or reconfirming them. We might perceive the world in a different way after visiting an exhibition, consider the movements that we make or the words that we use differently after experiencing a dance performance or reading poetry. Ways of seeing or moving, provoked by the challenge (*Herausforderung*) that the work of art poses, can have meaning in the world outside art, in the same way that thinking about works of art, the meanings we derive from them, can have a profound impact on our lives. This is precisely what makes interpretative practices not only meaningful, but moreover also invaluable.

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Notes

¹ As Roger Scruton puts it: “[M]y words are only a gesture, [while] the real meaning of the painting is *bound up with, inseparable from*, the image. [...] The meaning does not reside in a content that could be identified just anyhow” (Scruton 2011, 93).

² See also Adorno 2004, 104: “Nature is beautiful in that it appears to say more than it is. To wrest this more from that more’s contingency, to gain control of its semblance, to determine it as semblance as well as to negate it as unreal: This is the idea of art.”

³ Cf. Baudelaire’s poem *Correspondences*: “Nature is a temple, where the living / Columns sometimes breathe confusing speech; / Man walks within these groves of symbols, each / Of which regards him as a kindred thing”, or the famous final lines from Rilke’s poem ‘Archaic Torso of Apollo’: “For there is no place / that does not see you. You must change your life.”

⁴ “If finished works only become what they are because their being is a process of becoming, they are in turn dependent on forms in which their process crystallizes: interpretation, commentary, and critique.” (Adorno 2004, 245)

⁵ This also explains why Adorno is so critical about the notion of ‘cultural goods’, which he considers as a neutralization of art.

⁶ Indeed, as Adorno writes, “no artwork is an undiminished unity” (Adorno 2004, 138).

⁷ “I characterize this process as articulation because it involves orienting one’s own activity toward the relations that are contained in the artwork” (Bertram 2019, 130).

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Narrative as Action: Paul Ricœur and the Emancipatory Power of Interpretation

BEATRIZ CONTRERAS TASSO

1. The Narrative Journey of Comprehension

Self-recognition is at the price of a difficult apprenticeship acquired over the course of a long voyage through these persistent conflicts, whose universality is inseparable from their particular localization, which is, in every instance, unsurpassable. Ricœur¹

Paul Ricœur's onto-anthropological thesis leading this reflection claims the emergence of oneself as an always singular experience of self-appropriation. Such reflective path is arduous, i.e., it is not the fruit of a sudden position of the subject, but the result of a reflection mediated by the symbolic and cultural plots that determine the reception of oneself. Namely, "The *self* is implied reflexively in the operations, the analyses of which precedes the returns toward this self" (Ricœur, 1992, 18). The ambition of a full and immediate consciousness of oneself without opacities, according to the Cartesian tradition, has been disrupted, as we know, from Nietzsche onwards (Ricœur, 1990, 22), by the philosophies of suspicion and deconstruction, which uncover concealed areas inherent to the subject's way of being. Phenomenology also walks through this demystifying path, which makes a decisive inflection that places the subject in an -open and intentional- relationship with the world and enhances the incarnated and bodily condition of this co-belonging. Authors such as Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre and Heidegger contribute to this task (Guenancia, 2018, 7). The well-known turn of Ricœurian phenomenology in its hermeneutic inflection, developed around the 1950s (Grondin, 2003, 87), responds to the complexities arising from human will and its fallible condition, which cannot be thematized directly and deserves to be deciphered through hermeneutics. Along these lines, the phenomenon of human fallibility is discovered in its affective roots and is interpreted in the language of the symbols and myths of evil. The structures gained in such an analysis yield clues about the possibilities and limits of human action. Ricœur continues the ontological exploration of the fallible human condition, beyond affective fragility and its misery, towards an interpretation of the imaginary potential of the capable man from the 1980s onwards (Ricœur, 1986). This philosophical path still follows the initial objective of searching for the comprehension of oneself. In *Oneself as Another*, Ricœur intensifies this quest with his hermeneutics of the capabilities (the power to say, to act, to narrate and to be self-imputable), which construct the living plot of the acting and suffering human being (Ricœur, 1990, 28). Narrative occupies a relevant existential place among the capacities, since it exercises the threshold function of all ethics (Ricœur, 1990) and, by the same token, constitutes the key interpretative mediation for the thematization of personal identity.

The crucial role of narrative, a key element of this analysis, refers to the imaginative potential of literature as a "true laboratory" where appreciations, evaluations and judgments about the approvals or disapprovals inherent to the action are tested (Ricœur, 1990, 139). Ricœur underlines the clarifying virtues of narrative due to its imaginative variation (Husserlian motto), capable of contributing unprecedented experiences that operate beyond the frontiers of philosophy. From the narrative instance, possibilities are opened up for the recognition of oneself in its identity, i.e., as Ricœur argues: "[...] in many narratives the self seeks its identity on the scale of an entire life..." (Ricœur, 1992, 115). Stories are mediations that forge historical consciousness and possess an indirect revela-

tory potential; they reveal modes of original correlation of oneself with the world and others, only accessible through mimetic imagination. However, the dialectic between selfhood and otherness also raises decisive ontological questions about another dialectic that links activity to passivity. Ricœur contributes from the hermeneutic arena to uncover the opacities inherent to such otherness, through a fine ontology of a triple human passivity, the passivity of one's own body/flesh, the passivity implied by the strange other, and the more intimate passivity of consciousness and its inner voice (Ricœur, 1990, 368). He thus refers to the alterity of the self and the stranger: an alterity that is structural to oneself because of its involuntary, bodily and embodied anchorage, which constitutes its mixed internal condition. Moreover, this otherness refers to its social and political anchorage, where the social institutions of language and intersubjective relations, collective interactions and common learning forge a social and political coexistence, not exempt from tensions and exposed to the conflict of rival interpretations. In this context, the comprehension of oneself and the impossibility of a definite appropriation remains a major challenge for the French philosopher, since it is rather a question of a continuous birth of oneself that crosses these dialectically interconnected poles of social belonging and personal identity.

On the other hand, the existential character of this experience of "self-narrative", inherent to the process of *giving an account of oneself*, speaking in Butler's terms (2012, 25), confronts us with the responsibility of self-recognition. This process comes from the need to distinguish the imposition of more or less explicit restrictive norms, rooted in our dependence on the social and political world. "In such a sense, narrative capacity stands as a precondition for giving an account of oneself and assuming responsibility for one's actions through that medium" (Butler, 2012, 25). From an existential ontological stance, the possibilities of emancipation of subjectivity start from the thrownness condition belonging to an unchosen facticity. (Heidegger, 1984, 175). Existence is experienced on this level as a burden, that is, as a demand to *have to be* and *keep* existing as a nondelegable task. To this burden we may add the ethical weight of being responsible for putting together an identity that is forged narratively and choosing its adhesion or rejection to the constituted world embedded in this new plot. Ricœur's hermeneutic-narrative approach relies on the possibility of plotting one's own story in order for personal and collective identity to emerge, favoring certain coherence in the midst of life's discordancy. However, this coherence is culturally anchored in tradition, which determines the limited possibilities of interpretation of each time. The problem caused by this involves the possibility of distancing required to free oneself from the unreflective belonging to tradition and even more, to respond to the emancipatory will of action. The hermeneutic tension between distancing from and belonging to tradition, between tradition and a critique of ideologies, long discussed by Gadamer and Habermas (Grondin, 2008, 97), places Ricœur as an intermediary. On the one hand, he subscribes to the confidence in the hermeneutic reading of the "naïve" or amplifying consciousness of the sense, which bases its exploration on the possibility of interpreting sense. On the other hand, he adheres to the vigilant and critical attitude of ideologies in their objectifying aspect, which warns against the power of ideologization or domination that conceals any convention (Grondin, 2008, 114). At the same time, Ricœur's diacritical hermeneutics (Kearney, 2004, 205), that is to say, his confident, open yet not naïve attitude towards the irreducible and decisive relationship with otherness, constitutes, in my opinion, a proposal that develops a virtuous bridge between philosophy and literature. The story as an act of the imagination is the bearer of new world proposals that widen one's own understanding and determine what Ricœur calls *narrative intelligence* (Ricœur, 2008, 261), which is closer to practical wisdom than to the theoretical use of reason. This clarifying *mimesis* of narratives of universal aspects of human action is, likewise, a pathway to one's own identity, since the power of narrative builds a passage to oneself, to temporality, to language, to action and life itself. In short, we connect with our own story through narratives, we remember it and we can transform it by unveiling the invisible symbolic obstacles of comprehension ruling our historical consciousness.

Reminiscing is in a sense a form of intellectual effort that we call memory, even more fundamentally a way of gathering, of continuing ourselves, in order to acquire this identity we can call narrative identity. (Ricœur, 2002, 13).

Personal identity is the fruit of a path of appropriation of oneself, as we said at the beginning of this chapter. The narrative component is part of this process of self-comprehension or, as Ricœur states, identity is narrative. To conclude this part, I rely on the thesis developed by Ricœur in his narrative theory of the *threefold mimesis* focusing mainly on *refiguration* (Ricœur, 1983, 144). This represents the culminating step in the creative process of narration. It is time for the reader or spectator to intervene, to put into action the receptive appropriation of the *world* proposed by the text, i.e., his or her capacity to model the experience. Refiguration is of fundamental importance for the reading hypothesis we are developing in this analysis, since, according to Ricœur, the reader appropriates or internalizes the proposal of the text, that which *speaks* in the text. In doing so, the possibility of widening one's own world is opened, because in this act the closure or fulfillment of the creative process carried out by every authentic narration is fully realized (Ricœur, 1985, 171). Analogically, something similar occurs with the idea of *katharsis* in tragedy, following the *Poetics* of Aristotle, since this purifying moment allows the spectators to end the tragic staging through an aesthetic, that is, poetic, experience of the feelings of compassion and dread, allowing them to understand the plot and live it *as if* it were "real". This hermeneutic transposition allows us to integrate the mimesis of the story into our own and through this operation we are able to cognize and recognize ourselves. Finally, *katharsis* has a political dimension since it "instructs" men on the depths of the passions constituting the chaotic human bonds that run through the life of the polis. Ultimately, *katharsis* reveals an "[...] elaboration of this "foundational disorder", not its domestication, let alone its eradication" (Revault d'Allones, 2010, 112).

Next, I will show the scope of the narrative refiguration of personal identity through the analysis of an exemplary tragic tale, *Antigone*, analyzed by Ricœur in *Oneself as Another*, giving some counterpoints from Adriana Cavarero's feminist interpretation.

2. The Modeling Power of the Story: Antigone

Ricœur insists on the importance of a regulated and non-arbitrary interpretation, since the act of poetic configuration –Ricœur's inspirational model– is arbitrated by a plot that gathers discontinuous episodes. Moreover, the plot folds the inconsistencies which constitute the human experience of an eventful life in a certain concordance or emplotment: the '*mythos* in Aristotelian terms or the *intrigue* in Ricœurian speech (Ricœur, 1990, 168–169). Narrative thus responds to a configurative logic that bears witness with mimetic, that is, imaginative, verisimilitude to those characters that describe agents as protagonists of their action. Ricœur's thesis about tragic wisdom and its power of indirect instruction of sensible action has been beautifully exposed in *Oneself as Another* in his Ninth Study (1990, 290), with his analysis of Antigone, Sophocles' tragedy². Ricœur's analysis in that interlude evaluates the profound meaning of the complex conflict regarding human life expressed in the poetic register (Ricœur, 1990, 290), from the point of view of its power to broaden the ethical reflection regarding action. Considering this purpose, Antigone represents an exemplary universal story about the contradictions that crown human existence, opposing irreconcilable forces that produce terrible outcomes, in which there is no good solution but a most valuable teaching that only yields consolation afterwards. Ricœur's interpretation does not elaborate on the specifying elements of gender differences that could explain the intention of the protagonists or their cultural biases, it throws nonetheless certain clues on the contradictions of the social, moral and political levels that can be productive for the present analysis.

To synthesize the well-known plot of the play, this tragedy confronts Creon, the ruler of Thebes, who must bury Eteocles with honors and punish his brother, Polynices, depriving him of a burial

(both brothers murdered each other). Polynices goes from friend to enemy for his betrayal of the city, and the posthumous punishment will be to leave his body exposed to the open winds to become food for the beasts, to obey the laws that guide political justice. However, this punishment violates the unwritten, eternal, divine laws of the fraternal obligation to bury a relative. Antigone, sister of the convicted, is sentenced to the death penalty for rebelling against the laws of the city and obeying the unwritten laws of family loyalty. She cannot but comply with the subterranean funeral laws that appeal to another immutable justice, beyond Zeus and whose mandate is fraternity. Antigone is discovered in the funeral rites of her brother and Creon sentences her to be buried alive. To make the plot more dramatic, her fiancé, Hemon, Creon's youngest son, pleads with his father to remove the punishment and come to his senses, but none of this happens and he commits suicide next to his beloved. When his mother discovers the tragedy, she commits suicide inside the king's palace. Creon belatedly discovers the tragic outcome, the loss of his wife and son, all as a consequence of his tyrannical and reckless action and his lack of clemency.

This tragedy exhibits a conflict between horizontal and vertical, political, religious and family orders that intersect. The transcendent level of divine laws responds to the mythical origin of the laws of the polis, which orders the ruler to comply with the common good. On this same status, Antigone is obliged to comply with the laws of the gods beyond the grave which impose the fulfillment of the funeral rites of mortals. On the horizontal level of political life, Antigone puts forward a moral quality of *philia* that expresses piety as an affective bond and reveals the insufficiency of the civic bond as the only criterion, wielded by Creon, for the relationship between rulers and ruled, bringing to light the limited human character of earthly institutions (Ricoeur, 1990, 284).

It is remarkable, however, that Ricoeur favors Antigone, despite acknowledging, following Nussbaum (2002), the inhumanity of her radical decision, due to the painful consequences for those left behind after her death. Ricoeur tries to explain his position by reasoning about the factors that incline him, some of which are worth mentioning: "Is it the woman's vulnerability in her that moves us? Is it because, as an extreme figure of nonviolence in the face of power, she alone has done no violence to anyone? Is it because her sisterhood reveals a quality of *philia* that is not altered by eros?" (Ricoeur, 1992, 245). These questions reveal an empathy that hints at a consideration that goes beyond the logical level of analysis and appeals to considerations of an affective order. That is to say, it exhibits a tacit level of valuation of the affective domain, not explicitly developed by Ricoeur's analysis, which is rooted in cultural and social factors. These determine the roles and consequently the difficult choices of the protagonists, as embodied and fragile actors, victims of a cruel fate, who stir our own affective capacities of compassion for their suffering, beyond the agonistic character of human action reflected in the play. Likewise, Ricoeur analyzes the inadequacy of Hegelian analyses in a charitable but no less firm way, by showing the fragility of Hegel's solution in the face of the tension of contradictions. In order to overcome contradictions on a higher scale of realization, Hegel places this way out on the level of the dialectic of overcoming (*Aufhebung*) of the powers of the spirit, subject in their genesis to passing through the stages of unilaterality of human character. (Ricoeur, 1990, 288). In my opinion, Ricoeur digs out an even deeper paradox, which refers to the inevitable conflict of moral principles confronted with the complexity of the ethical meaning of life. This complexity is exposed in social evaluations, in the considerations of justice and equity distributed on opposite and irreconcilable levels, which fall into the "ruinous alternative of univocity or arbitrariness" (Ricoeur, 1990, 290).

Following this thread of thought, Ricoeur underlines the rigid distribution of moral estimations and social roles, which impoverish the capacity for a more inclusive dialectic of the human variables of life. This determines antagonistic, incompatible points of view, which leave out the possibility for the political to broaden the virtues that govern it, to combine political justice with affective and family justice, giving a more tinged and complementary place to the affections. Such affectivity influences not only private but also political decisions, but also motives or reasons of action on whose extreme polarity many deeply rooted values of our western culture have been built.

Ricœur questions the possibility of eradicating conflict from human life, and in this we see the instructive function of tragedy, for the story operates with a pre-moral “logic” that builds the plot of the action without taking moral sides, for or against the heroes, since they cannot be judged with a single criterion. Since in tragic *mimesis*, unlike ethical reflection, deliberate decisions are mixed with the obligations that come from destiny, this ambiguity allows the chorus and spectators to feel the compassion proper to *katharsis*. That is to say, a deep sense of tragic wisdom lies in showing the reversible dimension of agent and patient that determines the heroes; a constitutive fragility of the passions, which cloud the action and trigger painful experiences of suffering despite the good intentions of the protagonists.

In this perspective, the hermeneutics of oneself draws key notions from the phenomenology of capacities that allow Ricœur to go beyond the scenario of fallibility by finding segments of clarity “favorable” to the understanding of the action symbolized in Antigone’s decision.

To conclude, I will take a key concept from Ricœur’s hermeneutic phenomenology of capacities that refers to the ethical character of ipseity. Personal identity as the ontological core of the responsive capacity of oneself, schematizes the highest power of attestation of oneself in the compliance of a promise, which designates the confidence of humans in being or not being able to do or act. The attestation tests the approval of the other, who depose the suspicion and encourages the agent’s own confidence, attesting oneself by remaining faithful to the given word. Antigone shows the most hyperbolic dimension of ipseity in its ethical capacity for solicitude. The sacrifice of one’s own life is the radical point of the human response to the other’s request. Here the fraternal bond is the symbol of this unwritten promise to bury the body of the diseased brother. This obedience or compliance exhibits an ipseity that has a “supra-rational” mandate, that is to say, an ethical adhesion whose anchorage is affective and is subject to laws of a supra-political order, to an *eros* that arises from a vertical axis. This decision combines elements of an affectivity whose wisdom comes from a source of solidarity or respect for the other that transcends the horizontal norms of political life. This separation of the rational and affective domains, of political and fully rational life and the private sphere of life, feminine, domestic, family, is also a mark of Western culture, as we will see below with Cavarero. A second element that integrates this analysis of Antigone’s decision refers to *courage*, as a symbolic Ricœurian concept to the ontological sense of elevated human passion.

The Platonic *thymós*, which has served as the basis of Ricœur’s analysis, is registered in a hermeneutic key, but without ignoring that Sophocles is pre-Platonic and does not carry the latter’s separatist dualism of body and soul. With this reservation, for Ricœur the role that the *thymós* has is clarifying as an emblematic passion of the heart, which can be identified with courage, i.e., the express representation of the affective anchoring of one’s own decision in human action. One could interpret the strength of the conviction that guides Antigone’s action in a Ricœurian code as a response to tragic wisdom. The sister accepts the sacrifice of her own love for the love of her brother, responding to the call of the heart she cannot refuse, keeping the promise to bury her beloved sibling. This conviction is not only anchored in reason, since the force that keeps her in the sacrifice of her own life is not blind, but it is strengthened by the courage which responds to a non-renounceable promise. Then, more than obedience to a cause, it is the command of the heart.

3. The Feminist Reading and its Emancipatory Force

The conflict exposed in *Antigone*, as shown, derives from the obedience to conflicting orders, where the protagonists are thrown by fate into circumstances they have not chosen and which force them to make decisions whose terrible consequences are irreversible (Ricœur, 1990, 281). A more penetrating reading of this story in ethical-political terms is achieved from a feminist point of view, complementary to the preceding analysis. The perspective that guides me is inspired by the hermeneutics of inclination developed by Adriana Cavarero (2014) as a counterpoint to a logic of power

based on war and domination. In order to narrow down a much more complex topic –that could be extended uncontrollably– I will address only two points of her analysis³. The first refers to the symbolic place given to the body by Sophocles in *Antigone* and the absent mention of the human soul, as an anomaly that distinguishes itself from the worldview of the burial rites related to the final journey of the souls, described from Homer to Plato. Namely, “On the hermeneutic plane of evidence, *Antigone* seems to express this problem in a strikingly absent psyche, thus in an unusually central body that, given the psyche’s absence, can function onstage as absolute symbol.” (Cavarero, 2002, 18). We will see below some of the implications of this vision that favors corporeality presented by Sophocles. The second point, linked to the previous argument, refers to the configuration of political life that exhibits the separation of the rational and affective spheres, which Sophocles registers in this tragic worldview. This division exhibits a separation of worlds that do not intersect, of roles that are separated, of external and internal human spheres that do unify. An ontology of separation and polarity that even marks the territories, places, the possibilities of action, as a background for assigning roles through categories of gender and power that delimit the human being and describe its borders. Let us look at both points in more detail.

a. The Symbolic Centralism of the Body

In Cavarero’s view, synthesizing much of her analysis, in the ancient Homeric world, conscious life is rooted in the body and its materiality by virtue of which we identify ourselves as persons with a name and a history. That is, our existence is this corporeality that dissolves with the disappearance of the body.

“A bit of this conscious history returns to the bloodless ethereal simulacrum only. Through drinking the eminently corporeal, and therefore vital, matter of warm blood. In short, life consciousness, and self-identity in the Homeric universe are bound within a corporeality that will come to refer to a simple constellation of meaning, one that encompasses, at its margin, also the psyche.” (Cavarero, 2002, 20)

This archaic conception that situates the body within the dimension of existence undergoes an inflection in the classical era (Cavarero, 2002, 21). Through several myths, Plato sublimely describes this displacement that loses the localized side of bodily existence and entrusts the most decisive role to the soul. Following Cavarero, this displacement opens an estrangement of our bodily and sensitive anchorage, and the bodily experience is thus charged by a negativity that leaves indelible traces in Western culture. This vision inaugurates a dichotomy between “[...] a disincarnated persistence of the self and a contingent flesh tormented by death” (Cavarero, 2002, 21). In this perspective, only the soul is immortal and acquires a sense of indisputable transcendence. Returning to *Antigone*, the dispute between the two main characters, *Antigone* and *Creon*, is related to the body – or rather: the body is the symbol of the problem and affects these two orders of the polis (*Creon*) and the family (*Antigone*). This question offers more complex issues as well, such as the bonds of consanguinity and incest (Cavarero, 2002, 25), which we will not address here. Here, at least, we need to imagine, making a variation “in the style of Husserlian eidetics”, – as proposed by Ricœur in his analysis of affective fragility (2009, 198) –, an origin of the bodily, or embodied, existential experience, which restores the carnal dignity of the affective. This makes it possible to integrate the human actions of affective experience as expressions of care and veneration with their own existential nobility⁴. In this perspective, *Antigone*’s decision can be interpreted not only as the fruit of an obedience to divine law, but as the expression of an ethical mandate that responds to the care of oneself, of the other and of the bonds that are rooted in a symbolic and real experience of respect for the body⁵. The vulnerability of the body, its exposed being, from birth to death is affectively revealed to us. Ricœur states “[...] affectivity reveals my bodily existence as the other pole of all heavy and dense existence in the world. In other words, it is through feeling that one’s own body belongs to the subjectivity of the cogito” (Ricœur, 2009, 118).

To draw the corollary of this attempt at interpretation, I turn to the second focus of the analysis, in which the hermeneutics of Cavarero's aforementioned inclination is outlined. Sophocles' tragedy refers to a world before Plato in which *hybris* displays its powers of attraction/repulsion of evil, expressed by the Greek concept of *deinon* (Revault d'Allones, 2010, 91), which brings together the admirable and terrifying passions in unison. The actions of Antigone and Creon are inscribed in this contraposition. The separation of orders of political and family life does not only respond to a political expression but expresses the ethical dimension that sustains interhuman ties. The value of bravery, war and the defense of the State coexists with other values that allude to more horizontal relations of solicitude. In this way, Cavarero brings a critical view of the agonistic values that found the relations of modern individualism, which is forged on this logic of struggle between human beings, in the style of Hobbes' political philosophy⁶. An opposite reading of the experience of destitution described by the Hobbesian state of nature, could exhibit another matrix of symbolic interpretation derived not from egoism, but from trust. A trust that is determined by an affective receptivity born of the human precariousness.

Cavarero proposes a notion of relationality that has a bodily or spatial anchorage, in a non-geometric sense, and based no longer on the simple exposure of one to the other on an ideal level of horizontality or reciprocity, but rather, as she points out "[...] a scene of dependence, as is that of natality, which instead foresees an unbalanced, structurally asymmetrical relationship between its two protagonists" (Cavarero, 2014, 33). A significant point is the fact that it proceeds from an atopic stance, in other words, it arises neither as an opposition to the logic of selfish competition, nor as a recovery of a relationship of simple horizontal reciprocity. Instead, it examines another form of "spatial geometry" that recovers the possibility of dissymmetry in human ties as nourishing and fundamental. Subjection to others exhibits a "virtuous" dependence that has its anchor in our fragile and exposed body and alludes, like Sophocles in *Antigone*, to the existential destitution that conditions our vulnerable existence from birth to death. This subversion of the ethical parameter of correspondence, revealed by Cavarero (2014, 33), offers an ethics of cooperation based on the reversible passivity of agents, dethroning the perspective of autonomy from its privileged position.

On the other hand, Lévinas can be a referent of the master of justice, which Ricœur interprets, when he reverses the roles between a powerful and compassionate self and a destitute other who becomes a master of justice (Ricœur, 1990, 379). The "geometry" that intersects the levels of horizontality and verticality is present in Ricœur as an expression of the overabundance of response in the Christian model of agape, developed in *The Course of Recognition* (2004, 345). The bond of mutuality is the only one that superimposes itself on the relation of measurable reciprocity, implicit in all ethics. The category of the solicitude can widen its scope of exercise when there is a "suspension" of the measure of equivalence, which does not imply forgetting the dissymmetry forged by a consented imbalance between demand and response, but instead accepting it as overabundance (Ricœur, 2004, 354). This openness to the *poetics of agape* is an alternative, but it does not exclude the *prose of justice* intrinsic in the model of reciprocity, nor does it in any way discount its merit, which is indispensable in political life (Ricœur, 2004, 348). Rather, it places the bonds of human interdependence in a supra-ethical framework based on the dialectic of the overabundance of love.

The positive effect of this logic, to end this roundabout and recover Cavarero again, does not cultivate the other's destitution as the advantage of a struggle for recognition. The loving bond of the newborn and the mother, for example, does not annul the need of both parties, one determining the other in a circle of mutual dependence. The mother's unmeasured self-giving is aroused by the disproportion of the parties, the destitution of the fragile and the obligatory responsibility of the receiver. Moreover, Butler recovers this capacity to feel obligation towards others, expressed by Ricœur in an exemplary way in his phenomenology of capabilities, in the condition of *receptivity* inherent to human fragility. She states, "According to this perspective of ethical obligation, receptivity is not only a precondition for action, but one of its foundational features" (Butler, 2014, 54).

b. A *Geometry of Inclination*

Returning to Cavarero, her interpretation can remarkably support the preceding analyses of Antigone with her hermeneutics of inclination. Expression does not refer, as is evident, to an objective spatiality, but rather develops a critique of the vertical, self-founded, independent and unconnected subject, representative of the free and autonomous self of modernity – nicely represented by Hobbes, Kant, Canetti, Schmitt (Cavarero, 2014, 23). The logic of dominance and its meaning of virility are expressed in the airy, erect posture of the capable subject as warrior. Exploring there a second signification, she underlines the meaning of *wound*, which comes from the Latin *vulnus*⁷, no longer as an expression of the violent blow delivered in the scene of the fight, in the “conceptual chain of wound, death, murder” (2014, 27). Cavarero develops her analysis of the essential nakedness of the human, of the wound as a sign of the exposed skin, of defenseless, that is, without weapons. The wounded human being becomes the archetype of the exposed body, replacing the virility of the warrior with a hirsute body. This interpretation does not fail to suggest parallels with the character of Antigone and her attitude of inclination and reverence towards the dead body of her brother.

The inclination can be illustrated by the image of the Madonna in the scene of the mother bending over the child. Cavarero refers to two words to make up this hermeneutic, *inermis* and *inclination*. The first means “unarmed”, which interpreted in the key of inclination and not of verticality, does not mean “without the possibility of defending oneself”, but rather refers to the impossibility of offending or hurting. Antigone finds herself in this position, as Ricœur emphasizes and as we have seen. She is not capable of any violence and can only exercise her action as resistance through the ritual act of her brother’s burial. The inclination refers back, following a suggestive semantic exploration, to a spatial stance, retrieved from Arendt: “[...] every inclination tends outward, it leans out off the self” (Cavarero, 2014, 34). Namely, the scene of the maternal relationship illustrates the responsible self, that which turns outside of itself by its “leaning out” to the outside, by the exit of its own self, by its inclination to the other that questions it. From this perspective, the polarized tension between verticality and horizontality, between wounding and healing, is displaced, considering its structural presupposition of decentralization. Inclination refers to: “[...] the postural archetype of an ethical subjectivity already predisposed, or rather, ready to respond to the dependence and exposure of the naked and defenseless creature” (Cavarero, 2014, 36).

Conclusion

Poetics finds an ethical fecundity in the common idea of *receptivity*. It can be understood as an affective *attitude* that exhibits inclination as a loving gesture of veneration and care. The same care for the dead that Antigone is forbidden to perform. Her rebellion is, on the other hand, a response of courage, refusing the laws imposed by the ruler, and conscious to the inclination of the request: she gathers in the same act the adhesion to the irrecusable and the rebellion towards the intolerable. The instruction that tragic wisdom provides has a high cost that cannot be ignored by practical wisdom. We deal with the difficult crossroads of accepting one’s own convictions and the risky costs of the will’s yielding to unwaiverable forces. The inclination as an incitement to trust rescues a model of ethical response that legitimizes the acceptance of an interpellation that inclines us, that *touches* and strips us of our verticality. It is a hermeneutic that offers a spatial grammar based on the primordial loving bond. This pole of inclination is what Cavarero’s double reading offers with the image of the Madonna in art, and which in my opinion finds echoes in Ricœur’s notion of solicitude, whose affective basis is also a significant element of his ethical proposal. Inclination as a gesture of surrender, of disarmament, according to Cavarero, allows us to think of an intersection between philosophy and literature. In this line, the poetics of inclination find echoes in the ethics of consent. The emancipating force of the story provokes a widening of the sense of ethical equivalence, by exhibiting an interpellation that inclines us with another kind of obligation that comes from feeling-with, a *consent* to the request of the other by an affective spring of acting. Poetics, and this is the point of an

imperfect but productive intersection with ethics, delves into the deepest dimension of caring whose powers overflow direct reflection, while ethics channels that undecipherable *deinon* through *phronesis* that gives courage a more lasting orientation.

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Notes

- ¹ Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey, Chicago: UC Press, 1992. p. 243.
- ² Antigone has elicited innumerable analyses and commentaries in every century, which exhibit her emblematic character to represent the tragic human conflict and the irreconcilable laws raised by human existence. Cf. my book, *Practical wisdom in the ethics of Paul Ricœur* (2012), §13, p. 274.
- ³ Adriana Cavarero delivers a thorough study to the question of the body and its symbolic dimension, not only in this tragedy by Sophocles, but in the broader cultural vision of Greek tradition. Cf. Cavarero (2002).
- ⁴ For a detailed analysis of the distinction between body and flesh in Ricœur, cf. David-Le-Duc Tiaha (2009).
- ⁵ Here I follow Judith Butler and her rehabilitation of the body and its ethical-political dimension. Namely, “[...] ethical demands arise from bodily life *per se*, a bodily life that is not always unequivocally human... If we try to understand in concrete terms what it means to commit ourselves to preserving the life of the other, we are invariably confronted with the bodily conditions of existence, and thus committed not only to the bodily persistence of the other but to all those environmental conditions that make life viable.” (Butler, 2014), 72.
- ⁶ Some of the ideas I develop below have been reworked, and were raised at Atelier Paris, *Fonds Ricœur* and EHESS in April 2021.
- ⁷ “Vulnerability, if we do not want to neglect its dominant etymon, is still an index of the wound, but it is now plausible that the obverse of this wound is the caress...”, (Cavarero, 2014), 27.

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Testimonies of Hope: Ricœur's Hermeneutics applied to Works of Lee Bontecou

MARIEKE MAES

In my contribution to the theme *(Con)textual Strategies: Understanding and Interpretation*, I will contemplate two works by Lee Bontecou (1931), with the help of the philosophy and hermeneutics of Paul Ricœur (1913–2005). I will first give an outline of the intention and the aim of Ricœur's philosophy, especially of his hermeneutics. Then, I will look at the work of Lee Bontecou. Finally, I will apply Ricœur's hermeneutics to some, for this essay chosen creations by Lee Bontecou.

Ricœur's Hermeneutics: Reading Texts and other Works of Art

The range of influence of Ricœur's hermeneutics is immense. His hermeneutical methods are applied in several academic disciplines. Besides philosophy, Ricœur's influence is also found in the fields of psychology, law, literary studies, and in biblical and religious studies. In my essay I want to show the applicability of Ricœur's hermeneutics for aesthetics and for works of art.¹

Building on the linguistic theory of Ferdinand De Saussure, Ricœur argues that texts, just as speech does, belong to the category of *events*. Like speech, texts aren't static phenomena, but bear temporal dynamics. In texts, like in spoken word, a dialectic of event and significance occurs, that, in Ricœur's words, reconfigures or recreates the world. Although this happens in both types of events, the differences between speaking and writing are illuminating.

Ricœur recalls the six factors of discourse which Roman Jakobson distinguishes in his essay "Linguistics and Poetics"² and analyses the changes that occur when they are applied to writing and texts: the speaker, the listener, the medium, the code, the situation, and the message. When spoken language becomes writing, the message becomes fixated. This fixation means a change for all the other factors. In analysing the changes in these factors, Ricœur comes to explain what a text really is, and which immense cultural changes are to be attributed to the act of writing: "Thanks to writing man lives in a world and not just in a situation."³

When speaking becomes writing, the speaker becomes the author, which means that a new distance is created between the written message and the writer, and above all, between the author (the 'messenger') and the receiver (the reader):

"The relation between message and speaker at one end of the communication chain and the relation between message and hearer at the other are together deeply transformed when the face-to-face relation is replaced by the more complex relation of reading to writing, resulting from the direct inscription of discourse in *littera*."⁴

This distance between the writer and her, his or their text, changes the character of all the other factors of communication that Jakobson distinguished. In the case of the spoken word, the recipient of the message is the listener, but in the case of the written word, the text, the recipient is the reader. The writer of a text is not per se present when her, his or their text is being read and understood. This new distance between the author and the reader is crucial for the development of the significance of a text. At first sight, this distance may perhaps seem to be an obstacle for the just understanding of the text's message. Because the author is not per se present, the text is not protected against misinterpre-

tation in a direct manner. This possibility for abuse of a text was one of the reasons for Plato, to name one, to mistrust writing.

Ricœur acknowledges Plato's critique, as that of Rousseau, and sees the dangers of orphaned texts. But to Ricœur, these critiques form the basis of an even stronger plea for writing. For Ricœur, the distance between author and reader is actually *productive*: because of their different situations and contexts a "productive distanciation" emerges.⁵ Together with the aforementioned criticisms of writing, the rather embarrassing critique of art developed by Plato in his *Republic* is Ricœur's starting point for developing his own theory of the status of the text. And he does this with the help of that same Plato. In *Phaedrus* Plato compares texts to objects of art. Plato says there that art constitutes a lower order of being, because it can only reflect the assumed *Ideas*, which are themselves the only basis for reliable knowledge. Ricœur, of course, renounces Plato's art criticism, but he retains the insight that it is important to examine the ontological status of art and, in part thanks to Plato, links the status of art objects to that of texts. For this, the work of François Dagognet *Écriture et iconographie*⁶ is illuminating. In line with Dagognet, Ricœur compares texts to icons. And icons are not a diminution of reality, but an "iconic augmentation".⁷

"Iconicity is the re-writing of reality. Writing, in the limited sense of the word, is a particular case of iconicity. The inscription of discourse is the transcription of the world, and transcription is not reduplication, but metamorphosis."⁸

In this comparison of texts and works of art, we find a wonderful justification for applying Paul Ricœur's hermeneutics to works of art. But in order to clarify the possibility of applying Ricœur's hermeneutics to Lee Bontecou's work, I will first need to say a little more about Ricœur's hermeneutics and its relationship to philosophical anthropology.

Anthropology and Hermeneutics in Ricœur's Philosophy

To better clarify the relevance of Ricœur's hermeneutics to *(Con)textual Strategies: Understanding and Interpretation*, we need to examine the relation between hermeneutics and anthropology in Ricœur's oeuvre. Ricœur's oeuvre covers more than seventy years of intensive philosophical thinking and writing. To his early work, the studies of Jean Nabert were important. The encounter with Nabert's work laid the basis of Ricœur's philosophical anthropology. According to Jean Nabert, being human means to be involved in the dynamics of the original affirmation of being and a longing for being. Especially in his *Éléments pour une éthique* Nabert gives a profound explanation of this original affirmation and longing for being.⁹ Original affirmation is here described as the origin of the Self and of self-consciousness:

"Being of the self can only exist by self-consciousness that is acquired by an affirmation that generates and renews this consciousness."¹⁰

The insights of Nabert belong to what is now called *Reflexive Philosophy*. A fundamental insight of Reflexive Philosophy is that human beings can only appropriate their identity through the detour of interpretation. Human life is drawn and motivated by a longing for meaning. This longing demands of a person to appropriate one's own being, to affirm to oneself that one's *being there* matters or is worthwhile. That one's existence is not entirely contingent. This appropriation becomes only possible through the detour of interpretation: by interpreting yourself and one's actions, other people, works of art and literature, one gains insight into who and what one can be or become. In short, these insights of Jean Nabert form the starting point of Ricœur's hermeneutics.

Besides Nabert, there are of course many other thinkers that were important for Ricœur's development. Also worth mentioning is Gabriel Marcel, as inspiring example of the practice of philosophy as a way of life and because of his particular attention to important philosophical problems, such as: the free will, hope and promise. Important too, was Karl Jaspers with his theory of ciphers. These thinkers especially, prepared the way for Ricœur's hermeneutics.

Ricœur's first study that can be seen as *hermeneutical* is part three of the *Philosophy of the Will, Symbols of Evil*.¹¹ Both Jasper's and Naberts influence on Ricœur's work can here especially be found in the investigation of symbols and in his approach of evil. Evil is dark, impenetrable, and thus – in Ricœur's words – defies philosophical and theological thought. Without the use of symbols, there would be no possible way to articulate human experience with and of evil: Being polluted, being lost, carrying a burden – typical symbols of shame, sin and guilt – give us an insight in divergent forms of consciousness of evil.¹² Without the interpretation of these symbols of evil, we would not be able to achieve any insight in ourselves. Self-consciousness is awakened by these specific symbols. And the symbols of evil always point to ways out of evil too: to ways of liberation, redemption and of atonement. They are joined, according to Ricœur, by symbols of hope: Hope to be washed and become cleansed, hope to come home again and to be liberated of the burden. According to Ricœur, the symbols of evil make possible that the longing for being is motivated by hope.

After his *Philosophy of the Will*, Ricœur published: *Freud and Philosophy, An Essay on Interpretation*.¹³ In this essay Ricœur confronts himself more systematically with the questions of hermeneutics and the problems of language. Ricœur herein agrees with Freud's adage: 'the human being is not master of his own house'. But he disagrees with Freud's position that man is moved solely by instincts, drives and compulsions.

However, the confrontation with Freud's work opened for Ricœur the way to several new studies on language and hermeneutics. For instance, questions of interpretation form an important part of the three volumes of *Time and Narrative*.¹⁴ *Time and Narrative* is a thorough study of the relations between literature and the formation of identity. *Time and Narrative* is strongly connected to *Oneself as Another*¹⁵, a study of philosophical anthropology. The connection I am aiming for here, is the notion of a *narrative identity* – which means that identity is not based upon a stable, imprescriptible fundament, but rather upon *attestation*. By that I intend that the identification of others and of ourselves is not done by any direct and clear insight into who and what a person *is*, but rather is a question of conjecture and belief. In other words: we are telling others and ourselves stories of ourselves and others, hoping to be able to appropriate, to *grasp* their meaning. We intend to become what we tell and hope to believe, or to become convinced of what we say. Literature and art are the great resources for the stories we tell in order to find significance. This means that art and literature are indispensable for the narrative of human identity.

Again, the main questions in *Oneself as Another* are: What does identity mean? Where is identity based on? What is individuality? Who or what is a person? What does it mean when we impute a deed to a person? Ricœur cannot agree with the position of Descartes, to whom the Self is an unshakable and untouchable foundation – nor with the position of Nietzsche, for whom the Self is merely illusion. The lasting influence of Jean Nabert can be found especially in the last chapter of this particular study, where Ricœur states that the Self is appropriated through detours of interpretation and in encounters with the (O)ther.

Ricœur describes identity in *Oneself as Another* as a dialectic between *idem* and *ipse*. By *idem* is intended: *what is formed* by identifiers such as the date and place of birth, someone's parents, and one's DNA. The empirical and historical 'facts'. The *ipse* consists of the stories that can be told about this *idem*, in which one can recognize or find oneself. Ricœur names this dialectic of *ipse* and *idem* the narrative identity. Telling a story is a *mimesis of action*, Ricœur states. To clarify this, we must have a look at *The Myth of Sisyphus*, as it was retold by Camus.¹⁶ Human action is intended as meaningful, which is beautifully illustrated in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. In this myth is told how the gods wanted to punish Sisyphus, and they do so by forcing him to do heavy, but meaningless work. (Of course, Camus may well have concluded that life has no meaning, but to me his *The Myth of Sisyphus* shows an entirely other outcome... It is a matter of interpretation.) Human action is intentional and to be forced to do meaningless work thus is torture. And the intended significance is told, examined and explained in stories. These stories form the fabric of the narrative identity. To be able to develop a

narrative identity, we are in need of art and literature. Human beings must appropriate themselves and art and literature are the privileged ways to be able to do so. To clarify this further, Ricœur then distinguishes prefiguration, configuration and refiguration. By prefiguration Ricœur intends the openness of human reality to storytelling. Configuration, to Ricœur, is the act of bringing together the diverging multiplicity of reality in time: to condense it into an intrigue and a plot. Refiguration, means the recreation of reality by the significance that is revealed through this process.

Ricœur's conclusion in *Oneself as Another* is that the epistemological and ontological status of human being can be described as the already mentioned attestation, testimony. Human identity, Ricœur argues there, is something that needs to be testified. Attestation is a type of belief, a possible way of seeing. It is not an unshakable principle or a truth, but it is neither a nothing, nor an illusion – as for instance Nietzsche, and more recently David Parfit, asserts. Ricœur:

“Attestation is the assurance of being oneself acting and suffering. Attestation is always vulnerable and threatened, especially by suspicion. Suspicion is the specific contrary of attestation. Suspicion for instance in the reliability of my given word. The kinship between attestation and testimony is found here. True testimony is contrasted by false testimony. “There is no true testimony without false testimony.”¹⁷

What is at stake here, is being *human* – being an *I*. That, what Heidegger named as: *Dasein* (*being there*). The way of being of *Dasein* is attestation, testimony. There is a kinship between attestation and testimony. Giving testimony asks of us to become a reliable witness. A witness of what? Of course, nowadays witnesses are asked about the eventualities in human life, under specific circumstances: in a Court of Law. But on a more general level, I would say: we are all asked to bear witness to human life. What is or was it all about? What is or was its meaning?

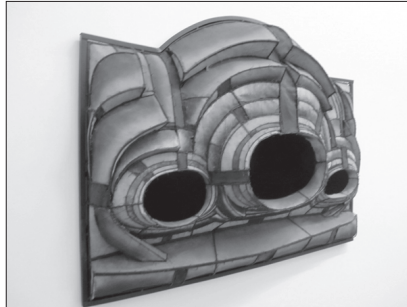
Lee Bontecou: Two Pieces

After this brief detour in the development of Ricœur's work, it now becomes an interesting challenge to confront Ricœur's philosophy with some particular works from the œuvre of the American artist Lee Bontecou. Especially because, as we have seen, Ricœur's anthropology and metaphysics include the value, and what is more: the necessity, of art for the project of being human. Art can be understood as the attestation of significance in human existence. What then, is attested of in the art of Lee Bontecou? Which stories, insights and ideas can be told by, with and in the work of Lee Bontecou? To what does her work bear witness?

In her essay, with the ominous title: *Against Interpretation*, Laura Stamps gives a clear overview of the life and work of the American artist Lee Bontecou.¹⁸ In 1956, Lee Bontecou received a Fulbright Scholarship, and this made possible for her to stay in Rome until 1958. It was there that she came into contact with old Greek and Etruscan art – and with modern, European art. But she also experienced the Post-War atmosphere in Rome and met with the traces of the disasters of The First and Second World Wars, and the inconceivable amount of human suffering that these had caused. It seems safe to say that these experiences must have left a deep impression in her. Bontecou rarely gives interviews and so we may find the *productive distancing* that is necessary to interpret her work autonomously. In Bontecou's early work we find sculptures made of canvas, steel and rags. Materials that were reshaped in fascinating ways. The materials, colours, and construction forms, I associate with personal memories of my visits to the Nazi concentration camps, in particular: of Theresienstadt. I recognize in these early sculptures the colours and shades of the tarnished barracks, of the mud and literally: of the rags. This impression is reinforced by the use of soot in the sculptures. Soot reminds us directly of the exhaust of industry, machinery and of the crematoria. In these early sculptures, which are often huge constructions, always one or more black holes can be found, around which the composition is centred. These black holes are especially ominous, as their blackness is impenetrable.

In later years however, from the 1980s to the 1990s, Bontecou started constructing very subtle mobiles. Entirely different in character: flying objects that are moved by air movements. Just as in

the early sculptures, only restrained colours were applied: the colours of sand and stones. To me, there exists a significant relationship between the early sculptures and the later mobiles. To explain this relation, we will now take a closer look upon two specific pieces, one sculpture that Bontecou created when she was young – and a mobile that originated in her later days.



Source: Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

The first piece we will contemplate is: *Without Title* (1961), which is in the collection of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. It is a construction of 136 x 188.5 x 37cm consisting of canvas, parchment, steel, and soot. The colours are different grades of brown, grey, broken white and black. When confronted with it, the eye is drawn towards three oval, intensely black holes. The form and colours of the construction, together with the intensity of the black of the holes, make me think of, besides the aforementioned concentration camps, the bunkers on the beaches of the Atlantic Coast. I remember being fascinated by these bunkers as a child, when playing on the beach. These bunkers appeared as ominous constructions, partly hidden by the sand. They are witnesses of war, of threat and suffering amidst the insouciance of summer holidays. The black holes in Bontecou's construction evoke specific memories of stopping at the entrance of a bunker on such a bright and warm, sunny holiday, and looking down into its, cold, intense darkness. The darkness of what it holds inside, of the history that it holds back. But the holes in the Bontecou piece also evoke associations with the exhaust pipes, that I mentioned earlier. The whole construction thus becomes a concentration of the many evils of modernity and the history of the twentieth century. Contemplating this object and engaging with it, the black holes start to feel like pupils that see the observer and wait, ask even, for a response. And so, these holes remind me of the famous description of *the Holy* by Rudolf Otto, *tremendum ac fascinans* – they are terrifying and fascinating.

Among the used materials in the construction is also parchment, and this opens another dimension of significance. Parchment is the material where upon, since ages ago, was written. For instance: the Torah. Parchment is durable. Parchment was used to carry letters, words, texts: it was the carrier of meaning and significance. On parchment histories were written down, to carry them through time to next generations. Parchment is made of the skins of animals. And the relation with skin takes us back to the concentration camps of WW II in an eerie way. Where people were stripped naked to be murdered. Where one could not save one's own skin and where both the misery of the victims, and the inconceivable evil of the perpetrators, gets deep under your skin.

The work consists of different forms. We find organic, round forms, such as of pebbles – and the more rectangular forms of for instance driftwood. Especially the driftwood-like forms are both metaphorically and literally reminiscent of homelessness and thus reinforce the aforementioned relations with the disasters of the industrial and mechanized modernity and the World Wars. So, the whole work is multidimensional and reveals divergent and particular meanings of being human and living in recent history. It reminds us too of the famous words in Deuteronomy from the Torah: "My father was a wandering Aramaean" (Deut. 26:5). Of wandering migrants. Bontecou's work

seems to be an appeal to not forgetting that. The symbols of evil, which Ricœur described in his aforementioned study, are here condensed into this work of art. The pollution of soot, the being lost in the forms and colours of driftwood and cobbles, the ominous black holes that seem to observe the observer and ask for a response.



Source: Kunstmuseum Den Haag.

The next creation from Bontecou we shall engage with is: *Without Title* (1996), a mobile constructed from steel, silk, porcelain, and thread. It is part of the collection of Kunstmuseum, the Hague. The applied colours are reminiscent of the colours in the work that we looked at first. Again: brown, grey and white – but here, also a warmer ochre. The effect on the spectator however, is entirely different. This is in part, due to the implementation of another material than parchment: silk. This material makes the colours here transparent and shiny, instead of opaque and dull. The black holes are still present, but now merely as the tiny holes in white, porcelain beads. This object causes a totally different effect than the piece we contemplated firstly. Since this piece is not mounted on a wall, but a mobile, pending in the air, its qualities are reminiscent of flying. This relates to heavenly creatures, such as birds and butter- or dragonflies. Perhaps even a relation towards angels may be justified: heavenly creatures that often announce good tidings of joy. But the work reminds us also of sailing ships, moved by air. The entire *creature* evokes feelings of lightness, movement and therefore perhaps of hope. It appears to possess the ability to move and to travel, and thus causes feelings of expectation and desire. Something good might happen. Something good, not evil, since the shapes are light and elegant: airy. Because of this, the piece forms a symbol of hope.

Christian Wiman writes about his experiences with the work of Lee Bontecou as follows:

“...part of what is so moving about her work is the sense of enclosed and solitary suffering that is slowly transfigured through the decades (you feel it underneath the social suffering, feel a single existential being struggling for meaning in the midst of immense, meaningless, inchoate, and seemingly all-controlling social and historical pressures). ... and then, still very much in the desert (the fact of emptiness, of absence, undergirds the assertions of the late work), a revelation comes: we walked into a room filled with large, delicate, astonishingly complex mobiles that hung from the ceiling – like sea creatures or dream creatures; we knew, at any rate, that we were suddenly in another element. And could breathe.”¹⁹

The two ‘creatures’ we have now examined, reflect indeed the quoted words of Christian Wiman. Solitude, suffering, longing for meaning, but they also form an appeal to the world. The first piece reflects a prophetic severity, with its dark holes and its parchment and steel. The second piece, with its silk wings and its lightness, is a witness of hope – liberated as it seems from the burden of gravity.

Conclusion

This brief encounter of the philosophy of Ricœur and works by Lee Bontecou, teaches us something worthwhile. In the work of Bontecou we may recognize qualities that relate to the ambiguity of human existence: the darkness and the despair coupled to a longing for joy, love, peace – and most of all: the longing for meaning and significance. That the hardship and difficulties, the hurt, is not meaningless. That what is suffered is witnessed and taken notice of. We may recognize in these works some of the particular themes to which Ricœur devoted his philosophical practice right from the beginning, when he chose Nabert's description of the dialectic of an original affirmation of existence and a longing for being as starting point. What does it mean to *be* a human *being*? Both the work of Bontecou and of Ricœur remains motivated by hope, which results in the eventual, beautiful mobiles from Bontecou and various, wonderful texts by Ricœur on love, justice, and existence as a form of attestation. In Bontecou's works we may recognize the attestation of both despair and hope.

What do we see, when we have a closer look at the above-described objects by Bontecou and interpret them with the hermeneutical methods that Ricœur has developed? Both the chosen objects, the relief/wall construction and the mobile, find their significance within the entirety of Bontecou's œuvre. We hereby can see between the two of them, a specific development in the language of forms over the years. The forms as such, as they are (half or entirely) spatial, remind us that there is more than just one perspective possible. And because they can, and even *need* to be seen from different angles, they are literally witnesses of the interpretability of reality as such. Bontecou's creations reveal their meanings within the horizon of the world where they were created in and from. They are witnesses of a not long ago, but bygone, historical world that bears the wounds and scars of war and crimes against humanity. A world that also bears the negative consequences of industrialization and mechanisation for the humane. Like us, human beings, the works find their significance in their historical development and context of origin.

But, as we have seen, these works are not just witnesses of despair, but also of hope. (In her later days Lee Bontecou also made *sandboxes* wherein she assembled objects of beauty, that appear to have met by coincidence, like things that wash up on the beach. But this contingency is here reshaped, into an intentional, meaningful structure.) Bontecou brought together different phenomena of reality in her work. As such, it is a good example of Ricœur's three forms of *mimesis*: the prefiguration, configuration and refiguration (in *Time and Narrative*). At first: reality invites, makes possible to do the work of *mimesis*, prefiguration. In the configuration of its construction, the first object we have examined testifies of the cruelty of war and the dangers of industrialization. But this testimony is at once a refiguration of reality. It shows the possibility of *seeing* from more than one perspective. In its particular configuration the piece reshapes aspects of reality and so enriches them with meaning and significances. The intensely black holes may obviously be interpreted as symbols of darkness, of all evil. But at the same time, they form an invitation to act, to come into action against evil: because there is, can and must be hope. The piece turns its spectator into an actor. It asks of the contemplator: do you see this darkness? What will you do about it? Will you flee? Will you fight? Will you bear witness to it? The piece shows that it remains possible to come in action. For the sake of justice and love. For the sake of life. Especially the mobile form – in itself a witness of movement, of action and thus of possibility – motivates the intention of hope.

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Notes

- ¹ For an explanation of Ricœur's hermeneutics, I will especially concentrate on the essays "Speaking and Writing" in: Paul Ricœur, (1976) *Interpretation Theory* and: "What is a Text", originally in: Paul Ricœur, *Du texte à l'action*.
- ² Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics" in: T.A. Sebeok (red.) *Style in Language*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1960. p. 247-324.
- ³ Paul Ricœur, *Speaking and Writing*, p. 36.
- ⁴ Paul Ricœur, *Speaking and Writing*, p. 29.
- ⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Speaking and Writing*, p. 43.
- ⁶ François Dagognet, *Écriture et iconography*, Vrin, Paris, 1973.
- ⁷ Paul Ricœur, *Speaking and Writing* p. 40.
- ⁸ Paul Ricœur, *Speaking and Writing*, p. 42.
- ⁹ Jean Nabert, *Éléments pour une éthique*, Paris: Presse Universitaires de France, 1943.
- ¹⁰ Jean Nabert, *Élément pour une éthique* p. 58: "L'être du moi ne peut naître que de la compréhension qu'il acquiert de soi par une affirmation qui l'engendre et le régénère."
- ¹¹ Paul Ricœur, *La symbolique du mal*, Paris, Aubier Montaigne, 1960.
- ¹² For an outline of Ricœur's *Symbols of Evil* see: Marieke Maes, "Paul Ricœur: Symbols of Good and Evil in History, the Bible and our Time". In: *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*. Vol. 12. No. 4. 2020 p. 161-174.
- ¹³ Paul Ricœur, *De l'Interprétation. Essay sur Freud*. Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1965, English translation: Paul Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy. An Essay on Interpretation*, Yale University Press, 1977.
- ¹⁴ Paul Ricœur, *Temps et Récit*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1983, 1984, 1985.
- ¹⁵ Paul Ricœur, *Soi même comme un Autre*. Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1990.
- ¹⁶ Albert Camus, *Le mythe de Sisyphe*, Paris, Gallimard, 1942.
- ¹⁷ Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 22. Charles Reagan, 'Personal Identity'. p. 7.
- ¹⁸ Stamps, L., "Against Interpretation." In: *Lee Bontecou. Hannibal*, Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, 2017. p. 10-21.
- ¹⁹ Christian Wiman, *My Bright Abyss. Meditation of a Modern Believer*. New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1913. p.150.

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- Benno Tempel, Laura Stamps, e.a. (red.), *Lee Bontecou*. Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, 2017.

Dada and Music: Tackling Musical Conventions

ARIEL ALVAREZ

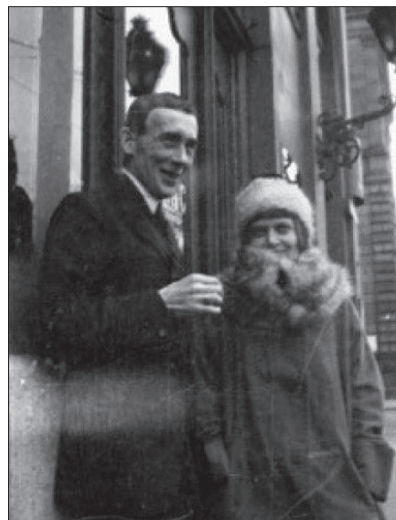
The Dada movement is known for its subversive, rebellious and anticonventional attitudes, manifesting itself mainly within the domain of art and literature. Dadaism, as an artistic movement, was active during a relative short period of a couple of years before and after 1920. After 1924 no more Dadaist activities were developed. However, since the Dadaists not only concerned themselves with artistic issues – as did earlier movements like Cubism or Expressionism – but with social and political issues as well, the Dada spirit survived its original period due to its anticonventional and nonconformist mentality and its sense of nonsense and absurdism. It continued to work in different art practices in Europe and America, like a smouldering fire or as a root system, a rhizome.

In the 1950s and 1960s Dadaist tendencies were revived by composer John Cage and the Fluxus movement in New York. Cage was influenced by Marcel Duchamp in particular, while most Fluxus members were strongly influenced by both John Cage and Dadaism. Lesser known is that certain Dadaists, although having a limited musical background, targeted the musical conventions of that time. In this paper I want to research how the musical concerns of these Dadaists can be understood within their overall, anticonventional attitudes. I will then take into account how their musical expressions were received at the time and whether their approaches influenced artists, musicians and composers of later periods.

I



I. The Meierei tavern in Zurich, 1935, where Cabaret Voltaire was staged.

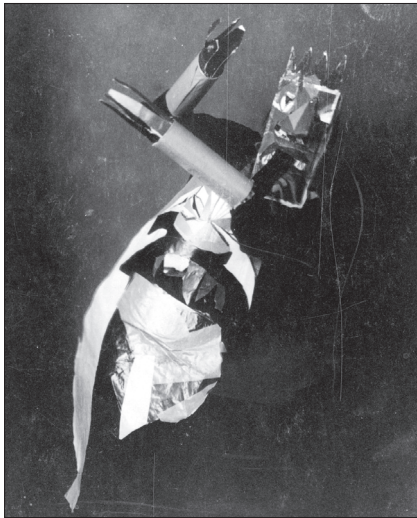


II. Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings, Zurich, 1916.

Initially *Cabaret Voltaire*, established in the back room of the Zurich *Meierei tavern* during the first half of 1916, had been planned to be a stage for artistic entertainment. It was founded by Hugo Ball.

The *Cabaret Voltaire* was a daily cabaret with musical and literary presentations by artists that would be present as guests, without any artistic predilection.¹ Modern-classical music, modern dance in free expression and modern Expressionist or Futurist poems were performed. Modern paintings and prints were shown on the walls.² Against the backdrop of the Great War, the performances soon became increasingly grim and irrational. The Cabaret Voltaire artists believed civilization was rapidly deteriorating. For their grim and irrational, but also absurdist and playful expressions, the word 'dada' was found as a common denominator.³ The *Cabaret Voltaire* performers – consisting next to Hugo Ball of: Emmy Hennings, Tristan Tzara, Marcel Janco, Hans Arp, Sophie Taeuber, Richard Huelsenbeck – rebelled against trusted standards and conventions, because they found these had lost their meaning and value in the circumstances of the war. Both in society and in the arts. They rebelled against the supposed rationality and logic of the authorities that had started the war, and of the people that supported them. They rebelled by presenting new forms of literary recitation that was inspired by the Italian Futurists – such as the simultaneous poem, in which various performers recite different texts at the same time so that no one in the audience could make out a single sentence. Also, they performed bruitist plays or sketches, that were accompanied by a variety of noises. Such as: rattles, whistles, sirens, propellers, typewriters, drums, clapping and stomping. One of the bruitist performers, Richard Huelsenbeck, was banging a big drum frequently. Furthermore, they recited sound poems consisting of non-existing, meaningless, abstract 'words', as if using a fictional language.⁴ Through the use of self-made masks and costumes, they reached a higher level of irrationality.⁵ All these methods were later adopted by the Berlin and Paris Dadaists.

In their visual works of art, the Cabaret Voltaire artists Hans Arp and Marcel Janco used abstraction, collage and unconventional materials. Such as: pieces of cloth, cardboard, rope and plaster. Berlin Dadaists Raoul Hausmann, Hannah Höch, George Grosz and John Heartfield, made collages with photos and newspaper clippings (photomontages), as well as assemblages of heterogeneous objects. These were methods of eliminating the sensitive, the personal and the signature from their



III. Sophie Taeuber dancing in a Cubist costume, Zurich, 1916.

work. In a similar manner and for much the same reasons, Max Ernst composed his visual works in Cologne, using printing clichés and cut out book illustrations. By these methods the Dadaists rebelled against the dominance of 'high' over 'low' art: 'Everyone Can Dada'⁶ they yelled on a text poster in their famous *Erste Internationale Dada-Messe* (First International Dada Fair) of 1920 in Berlin. Another one of their slogans was; 'Dilettantes Revolt Against Art!'⁷. They criticised the inviolability of 'high art' and rebelled against the idea of the supposed artist-genius. The dada attitude was iconoclastic, in the sense that the Dadaists were fighting traditional or conventional artistic methods and ideas by destroying them. Apart from using non-artistic, impersonal, found materials such as newspaper clippings, photos and found objects, they also applied chance, as a method to avoid predictability. And, of course; irony, cynicism and humour became natural ingredients for the Dadaists. The here described methods and approaches became part of the strategies that define Dadaism.

II

Music played an important role in the *Cabaret Voltaire* soirees. Founder Hugo Ball and some professional, classically trained pianists, played music by modern-classical composers such as Reger, Liszt,



IV. Opening of the First International Dada Fair, ca. 30 June, 1920.

with shrill dissonances, culminating in a boisterous climax. At right angles to the piano he had placed a harmonium. While his left hand played the piano friskily, he pressed in, with his right forearm, as many keys of the harmonium at once, as possible – all the while operating the pedals of the harmonium energetically, with his right foot. Heusser juxtaposed heterogeneous styles, with a preference for jazz and a major role for chance. He combined pseudo church music with experimental sounds. That heterogeneity, the use of different styles side by side, but also the combination of high culture (serious music) and low culture (marching music, popular music, folk songs), was indicative of a critical and anti-artistic approach that became characteristic of Dada in Zurich.¹⁰

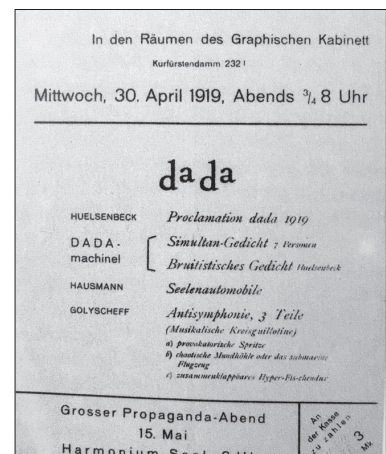
The protagonists of Berlin Dada adopted Futurist-Dadaist methods such as simultaneous poetry and bruitism, and introduced *noise* as a representation of the vivid and chaotic modern life. They loved contemporary jazz music. George Grosz wrote poems that he called ‘Sincopations’, to which he danced on stage. But, unlike the Zurich Dadaists, the Dadaists of Berlin didn’t give music a prominent place in their manifestations.¹¹ However, in composer and visual artist Jefim Golyscheff, they saw a true Dadaist. He showed assemblages of heterogeneous, banal objects in their first Dada-exhibition in 1919, much to their acclaim. Golyscheff was invited to perform some of his musical compositions at a couple of Dada soirees. For a specific soiree in 1919 he had composed a piece called *Keuch Maneuver* (*Gasp Maneuver*), in which self-made instruments and kitchen utensils had been used. On an earlier soiree Golyscheff had performed his composition *Anti-Symphonie*.¹² At his sign, a girl in a white dress sat down at the grand piano, while Golyscheff announced his *Anti-Symphonie* with the voice of an electronic puppet. Many years later, Raoul Hausmann commented on Golyscheff’s piece as follows:

*Ay Ay, Mr Johann Sebastian Bach, your well-tempered disorder is crashing with the dodecaistic Antisymphony! Over and out with the fancy sounding plait of that oh so sublimely grounded tradition! Dada also triumphs in tones! Gentlemen, are your rusted-up ears ringing? Allow the musical circular saw to deal with them! Rinse the remains of your voice with Golyscheff out of your chaotic mouthcave!*¹³

This performance was, much like Heusser’s drum performance in Zurich, true musical iconoclasm – although it wasn’t devised and performed by the core Dadaists. On the first Paris Dada soiree, music by Satie and Les Six¹⁴ was played on pi-

Debussy, Scriabin, Rachmaninoff and Saint-Saëns.⁸ Modern and innovative music that used atonality and dissonance, but not per se *iconoclastic* music – since basic elements like the structure of a composition remained preserved. After five months, *Cabaret Voltaire* had stopped, but other Dada soirees were still being organised. Incidentally and mostly for a small audience. One of those soirees was dedicated to the pianist-composer Hans Heusser, who had played piano in earlier Dada events.⁹

For this particular soiree, Heusser had planned a totally iconoclastic performance. His compositions for piano, harmonium and voice, avoided traditional harmonies. The music he performed was strongly rhythmic, referring to so-called ‘primitive’ cultures,



V. Program for the Berlin Dada Soiree of 30 April, 1919.

ano.¹⁵ It was modern and experimental music but I would not name it *iconoclastic* music, because many conventional musical elements were kept intact. However, on two of the next major Dada manifestations some outrageous musical compositions, made by Dadaists themselves, were impassively performed by a professional pianist.¹⁶ Apparently, some of the core Dadaists felt an urge to compose music as well. The writer and painter Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes had composed his musical pieces by using a self-made, pocket size, sort of roulette devise. This way he let chance determine the positions and order of the musical notes – and possibly also of elements like meter and rhythm. The result was a dissonant melodic and harmonic pattern, that became increasingly complex by the use of chance, repetition and the adding of different layers. He also parodied established musical notation by incorporating illogical, contradictory instructions to certain sections of the score. Visual artist and writer Francis Picabia also composed occasional musical pieces for such Dada soirees. Announced as ‘sodomist music’, one piece consisted of a series of repetitions of three notes varying in speed and duration, all performed by the same professional pianist. In this way, traditional musical conventions were torn down. Like in Dada visual arts, the cult of the artist-genius was attacked in Dadaist music too. No musical training was needed and neither was virtuosity sought in the performances. Everyone could make music. The music of both Ribemont-Dessaignes and Picabia broke with all expectations and conventions, and with the supposedly good taste of the upper classes. The class of authorities and politicians.¹⁷

The use of chance became an essential creative method for Dadaist artists. Marcel Duchamp¹⁸ used chance to establish certain goals or new standards. From a one meter height, he dropped three pieces of thread, each of one meter length, which he then fixed on canvas in the forms they had attained by chance (*Three Standard Stoppages*, 1913–1914). He considered these forms as a new standard to work with, and moreover, by doing so he questioned the infallibility of common standards.¹⁹ Other standards appeared to be possible! At around the same time he developed his musical experiments. During the Christmas holidays of 1913, while staying at his parents’ home in Blainville, near Rouen in Normandy, Duchamp invited his two youngest sisters to participate in his composing method. He had written down musical notes on pieces of paper which he put in a hat. Subsequently, he picked them out at random to write them down on music paper. He repeated this procedure twice, to obtain three parts, to then be sung by his sisters and himself. He named the piece: *Erratum Musical*.²⁰

For another piece, originated about the same period, entitled *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors Even. Erratum Musical*, Duchamp devised a more complex composing method. He numbered all keys of a piano 1 to 85, from left to right. Likewise, he numbered a set of 85 small balls. Other instruments he used, were a couple of small trolleys and a big funnel. The procedure Duchamp applied was as follows: he filled the funnel with all of the numbered balls, then led the trolleys at varying speeds under the funnel, collecting the dropping balls at random. He then took the balls out, one by one, and recorded their numbers on music paper. This procedure could be repeated infinitely, with the same set of balls falling in entirely different sequences in the trolleys. The result was a randomly composed piece of music, that was preferably to be played on a mechanical piano or organ – thus avoiding a virtuoso musician giving an individual interpretation of the piece. Such a conceptual, and really iconoclastic method of composing – that was based on chance, combined with a mechanical performance – could hardly express any kind of emotion as traditional compositions were believed to aim for. Moreover, since every note could only be used once per sequence or ‘period’ as he called it, Duchamp’s compositions lacked traditional and recognized standards, such as chords or harmonies, or the repetition of patterns. The music implied a rather demanding and unconventional listening attitude.²¹

III

Not much can be found about the reception of the musical performances by Dadaists in Zurich, Berlin and Paris by audiences and critics. A review of the Hans Heusser soiree in Zurich, by a critic

of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (June 2, 1917), simply accepted the lack of traditional harmonies and the abundance of strong rhythms as a part of Dadaist theories. But the critic did mention he would rather have liked some more uniformity and melody in the work. In Heusser's oriental dances the critic recognized the rhythmic and 'erotic' sound figures of 'primitive' people. But the critic couldn't appreciate the mingling of 'archaic tendencies' or church music with 'extreme futuristic' sounds. All in all, he couldn't see these 'insane' expressions as either 'music' or 'art'.²²

In Berlin, the insults of the Dadaists towards the audience, on the soiree that had Golyscheff's *Anti-Symphony* on the program, were appreciated by the audience as farcical, according to another critic. In contrast to some other Dada manifestations, the audience was not at all shocked and did not feel an urge to protest.²³

In Paris however, Ribemont-Dessaignes' music had an utterly disturbing effect on the audience. The subsequent uproar consisted of shouts, cries and whistles that united in a discordant harmony with the music. When at the end of the soiree a well-known professional singer performed a late-romantic song, that was misleadingly announced as a 'manifest', she was booed off the stage. Everything the Dadaists came up with at that point in the programme, was thereafter ridiculed and dismissed by the audience.²⁴

A rebellious audience was not reserved to Dada manifestations. Many performances of avant-garde pieces at that time, that broke with traditional concepts of music or art, were met with an uproar by a shocked audience. Think of what happened at the premiere of Stravinsky's ballet *Le Sacre du printemps* (*Rite of Spring*) in 1913 in Paris. But innovative composers like Stravinsky were unambiguous about their new works, while the calculated musical provocations by the Dadaists were often just part of their overall strategies.

If common Dadaist features included an opposition to accepted, traditional or conventional, values in arts and society – in order to shake up expectations and to attack rusted-up, bourgeois mindsets, to question the distinction between 'high' and 'low' art and to attack the cult of the artist-genius and of academically trained artists – this naturally also applied to Dadaist music.

The Dadaist methods, which we have been able to distinguish so far, were: the use of non-traditional artistic materials for addressing unconventional topics and themes, the use of chance with a subversive, provocative attitude and a certain playfulness, and a good sense of anarchic humour and absurdism. These were all applied with the intention of disturbing set expectations and opinions of audiences. All these methods apply to Dadaist music: juxtaposing classical music with popular music, working with non-musical objects as instruments, using chance, and discomforting the audience expectations with anticonventional musical performances.

IV

In the slipstream of the Dada movements in Berlin and Paris a few composers appeared who – at least at one point – addressed conventional expectations. Although they were all influenced by Dadaism, they were not members of original Dada groups. Such composers were: Erwin Schulhoff and Stefan Wolpe in Germany, and Erik Satie, Edgard Varèse and George Antheil in Paris. What connects their approaches to dadaism is a significant degree of nonconformism, an *iconoclastic* attitude towards supposed good taste and accepted ideas and forms – and a good sense of humour. These composers shared an interest in popular and jazz music, and introduced distinctive rhythmic patterns – using percussion in a way that reminds of Hans Heusser's rhythmic performance at 'his' Dada soiree in Zurich, or of Huelsenbeck's big drum at the *Cabaret Voltaire*.

Erwin Schulhoff was politically engaged, like the Berlin Dadaists, and an advocate of revolution in the arts. He displayed a distinct sense of absurdity in at least three pieces from 1919. In *Futurum* is a silent piece, consisting entirely of rests, which anticipates John Cage's *4'33"*. It has the following performance instruction: 'the whole piece with free expression and feeling, always, until the end'. The sheet music for Schulhoff's *Sonata Erotica für Solo-Muttertrompete* (*Sonata Erotica for Solo-*

Mother Trumpet), bears the notation that this 'sonata' had to be a piece 'in which a soprano spends several minutes faking a carefully notated orgasm'. *Symphonia Germanica* was composed as a satirical charge against the German nationalism and militarism of those days. In it, the German anthem was cited in a highly ironic manner. A voice is wailing and growling chaotically 'Deutschland, Deutschland über alles...', accompanied by divergent miscellaneous noises.²⁵

Stefan Wolpe integrated elements of jazz and popular music into his compositions, alongside Dadaist characteristics like: sudden surprises, extreme contrasts, the use of chance and the simultaneity of unrelated elements. These particular features kept his interest all of his professional life. An early example of his particularly, Dadaist vision on music was a performance in which he had eight gramophone players at his disposal, of which he could regulate the speed. This way he would play a Beethoven symphony very slowly or very quickly, and combine that with funeral marches or popular tunes like waltzes.²⁶

Both Varèse and Antheil applied, influenced by jazz music, strong, percussive rhythms in their music, and incorporated unconventional instruments like sirens and all kinds of exotic percussion instruments. Antheil even used electric bells and airplane propellers for his piece *Ballet Mécanique* (1924).

Erik Satie used pronounced rhythms in his works as well, towards the end of his life. For example, in his last composition, which was for the *Relâche* ballet (1924). The choreographic piece included the absurdist *Entr'acte* intermission film, for which Satie cooperated with Francis Picabia, who devised both the ballet and the film. Several of Satie's compositions had, apart from their anticonventional form, absurdist titles like *Three Pieces in the Form of a Pear*, or *Tapestry in Forged Iron*, the latter belonging to a series he called *Furniture Music*. These titles are reminiscent of the alienating, non-referential and playful titles that Duchamp gave to many of his works.

Distinguishable Dadaist tendencies hardly resurfaced within the arts again, until the 1950s. With the exception of composer John Cage. Cage came in contact with the works and ideas of Marcel Duchamp at an early stage of his formal education.²⁷ As a result, he started experiments with non-musical instruments in the 1930s, things like metal plates and household objects were 'played' in a rhythmical way. Switching appliances on and off, and making percussive patterns with divergent materials. Other such early experiments by Cage included the development of the 'prepared piano'. Things like nuts and bolts, screws and rubber erasers were inserted in between the strings of the piano, to acquire strange, unconventional sounds when the instrument was played. Like Duchamp, John Cage used chance as a compositional method. In 1951 a copy of the *I Ching*, or the *Book of Changes* was presented to him. He started to write music by consulting the coincidental 'answers' the book gave him to specific questions he posed, related to the score – such as pitch, duration, intervals.²⁸ He kept applying this chance-method in all his professional life. Using chance and non-musical instruments in a playful manner, disregarding any strict distinction between 'high' and 'low' art, but also by integrating art and life, Cage manifested a distinct Dadaist stance – except that his methods were aimed at creating new music, while perhaps for Duchamp and Dadaism in general, breaking down conventional values was the main goal – as it was for Fluxus.²⁹

V

Dadaist features and methods were widely adopted in the later, international Fluxus movement (USA, Germany, Japan, Netherlands) in the beginning of the 1960s. To label the movement, the term: 'Neo-Dada' was used. Fluxus included artists, poets, composers, designers and people from outside the artistic field. Their view on art, and on the art world as well as on society, was in many ways like that of the Dadaists. Fluxus members distanced themselves from the commercial art world and considered finished works unimportant. They attached great value to the creative processes. Fluxus operated outside of conventional, so called 'mummified' art institutions. Like John Cage, from whom they drew much of their inspiration, they took the position that any boundaries between art and

everyday life should be broken down as much as possible. Like Dada did, Fluxus attacked artistic conventions: Fluxus works and events had to be simple and were allowed to be entertaining.³⁰



VI. Piano Activities performed during Fluxus Internationale Festspiele Neuester Musik. Hörsaal des Städtischen Museums Wiesbaden, Germany 1962.

Fluxus participants applied the method of presenting everyday objects and performing banal acts as art. This was considered 'anti-art' and 'anti-music'. In 1962, in Wiesbaden, Germany, a great *International Fluxus Festival for Newest Music* ('Fluxfest') was held.³¹ Besides performances by several Fluxus members, music by John Cage was performed, next to music by modern composers like Stockhausen and Ligeti. To give some idea of what these, then 'newest,' Fluxus musical performances would have sounded and looked like, I will describe some specific performances.

A group of Fluxus members, lined up behind a table, made gestures and sounds by tapping, jumping, clapping and knocking. In another performance blocks of wood, a duck whistle, a small pair of scissors, a violin and a double bass – that was 'prepared' with clothespins and glue clamps and played with all kinds of materials – were used. During their 'Four Directional Song of Doubt for Five Voices', five performers each repeated their own word of a sentence. In the piece 'Piano Activities,' a prepared, grand piano was 'played' by the present

Fluxus performers with a hammer, a saw, a large brick and various household objects, until it was completely demolished.³²

Cage's prepared piano, was taken to the extreme by Fluxus member Nam June Paik. He not only manipulated every possible part of a piano with all kinds of objects and materials, he also connected them to electrical devices – such as light bulbs and hair dryers. The keys that were still playable, activated those devices when hit. The audience was invited to come on stage and play the piano. Apart from Fluxus' ambition to seriously investigate new creative processes, this approach can also be interpreted as an attack on conventional musical practice, wherein the audience is turned into the performer and the work of art is democratically defined by both the artist and the public.³³

On the last day of this *Fluxfest* in Wiesbaden, music by Pierre Schaeffer was performed. Although Schaeffer had no connection with Fluxus himself, his method of working resembles the Dadaist practices of collaging and assembling. Through his work for a French broadcasting station, he was able to combine his expertise as an engineer with his passion for sound. He experimented with the electronic equipment of the radio studio to create a wide variety of sounds, and combined these with recorded music from gramophone records. He rerecorded fragments of records, either playing them backwards, or delaying them, accelerate, repeat them, or have them played in loops. Later on, he started using self-recorded, ambient sounds. One would hear pieces of piano music mixed with fragments of conversations, or the sounds of steam trains and spinning lids – whether or not manipulated by electronic devices. At a later stage, Schaeffer was able to use a new studio that had a tape recorder. The magnetic tape recorder was a revolutionary innovation in sound recording at that time – a godsend for Schaeffer to expand his experiments with much more ease and many new possibilities.

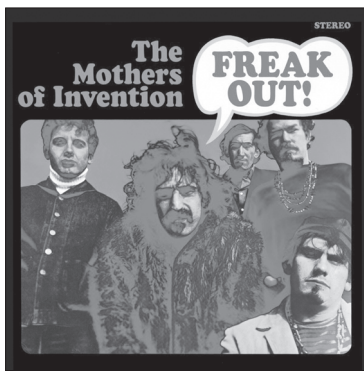
Schaeffer coined the term *musique concrète* (concrete music) for his sound collages. His music is often remarkably rhythmical and harmonical. Like Cage, Schaeffer sought out the limits of what

musical expression could be and explored uncharted territory with pure technical means. His way of working changed the traditional process of musical composition. A classical composition begins with the abstraction of traditional musical notation, which then results in audible music. But concrete music starts with the opposite: with concrete and specific sounds that lead to a composition through an extensive process. With his concrete music, Schaeffer had a great influence on composers and musicians of different directions.³⁴

VI

Dadaist strategies also were employed by certain rock musicians and rock bands. I will here, briefly consider Frank Zappa, The Residents, Einstürzende Neubauten, Cabaret Voltaire and Throbbing Gristle.

The musical collages or concrete music that Pierre Schaeffer had developed were among the methods that the American rock artist Frank Zappa used. Already on his first albums in the second



VII. Front cover of the first album by The Mothers Of Invention (1966).

half of the 1960s. In his teens Zappa had been a passionate listener of blues, rhythm and blues (R&B) and rock 'n' roll music; but he had also discovered the rhythmical, percussive music of Edgard Varèse. With this self-taught musical background, Zappa learned to combine an avant-garde interest in experimentation with poppy tunes and an ironic sense of humour. The music he did with his band *The Mothers of Invention* consisted of a mix of R&B and percussive avant-garde pieces, with bland vocal parts. He often applied distorted vocals and instrumentation, as well as musical collage. In his lyrics he manifested a very critical and ironical stance on American society. He matched his seriousness with a sharp irony and broadened rock with avant-garde experiments, often in the range of one song. This way he contrasted and mixed, 'high' and 'low' art.³⁵

The Californian band The Residents used an extensive set of anticonventional strategies to attack the commercial music business, achieving a high level of both irony and absurdism. On their first albums, in the mid-1970's, they tackled as untrained musicians, divergent popular songs by contemporary acts like Nancy Sinatra, The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and Iron Butterfly. In later years, they did heavily edited versions of songs by Elvis Presley, James Brown and Michael Jackson, deconstructing them and rendering them bare – generally impenetrable for listeners that are familiar with the original popular tunes. This ironical and 'anti-musical' attitude, is reminiscent of the musical approaches by Dadaists. Subsequently, the status of rock musicians – especially that of rock stars – was fundamentally attacked by The Residents. The Residents consequently concealed their identities by wearing masks on stage and never revealing their real names or personal data. Their masks, that have the shape of an eyeball with a top hat on, have ironically become iconic. This anti-rockstar and anti-pop attitude, can be considered as equivalent of the Dadaist anti-genius attitude and their critique on consumerism.

The strategies of both Zappa and The Residents are similar of Dadaist strategies, in the way they question musical conventions and commercialism. Both use appropriation and transformation of existing pop songs, similar to the Dadaist cut-and-paste strategy with magazine clippings and photographs. Moreover, like the Berlin Dadaists in particular, Zappa and The Residents showed a similar critique towards conservative values and right-wing politics.³⁶

Like The Residents, the Berlin rock band Einstürzende Neubauten started off as a group of untrained musicians. The Neubauten scoured scrap heaps in search of material that can be used for percussion or texture sounds. Their musical approach starts with almost nothing, aiming to make 'music' without conventional instruments. Shopping carts, trash cans, iron sheets, oil drums and all

sorts of other metallic stuff that was found on scrap heaps and construction sites were supplemented with power tools, like drills and chainsaws. Punk rock's *do-it-yourself* mentality was pre-eminently true for this band in its first phase (from 1980 onwards). But rather unlike punk – which 'first wave' as a movement was already over at the time Einstürzende Neubauten started – they did not apply a fast '1-2-3-4!' time with a basic, three-chord progression. Neither other familiar rock elements, such as choruses and bridges, are found in the music of the Einstürzende Neubauten. Routine had to be avoided, logic was sabotaged, all self-evident approaches were disrupted. All totally like Dada. Apart from rock music, Dada and Futurism were actual sources of inspiration for the Einstürzende Neubauten. They payed tribute to Dada with their: 'Let's Do It a Dada', that was released in in 2007, when their music had evolved into more conventionally structured songs.³⁷

Two bands from the industrial Northern England were Cabaret Voltaire and Throbbing Gristle. These were unschooled musicians too, that used electronics as the basis for their musical experiments. Reminiscent of Fluxus, they considered themselves as non-musicians that rebelled against conventional and commercial rock music. Both groups were inspired by the Dada movement – it's not without meaning that one of these named itself after the infamous Zurich Dada stage. Both groups also applied the literary *cut-up* technique, popularized by the American beat-writer William Burroughs. Burroughs was, in turn, indebted to Dadaist Tristan Tzara with his recipe for a Dadaist poem: cut a text into pieces, shuffle these and then re-arrange them in random order.³⁸ While Cabaret Voltaire was mainly about experimentation with sounds and rhythms, Throbbing Gristle was out for *anti-music*.

On an attic, Cabaret Voltaire created its own musical universe using a tape recorder, an analogue synthesizer and a self-built oscillator, into which they fed the sounds of voices, a clarinet, a drum machine and an electric guitar. Everything they put in, came out strongly distorted. They cut and pasted divergent fragments – whilst improvising and by using chance – into compositions, that were reminiscent of concrete music and the cut-up method. An example of their first, experimental phase is: 'The Dada Man', a recording that was composed of synthesizer sounds, ambient sound recordings, and ascending and descending rhythms from an edited drum machine – avoiding a fixed rhythm – and that varied in pitch and volume. Sometimes they drove around in a van from which their tape loops were blaring. They roamed pubs with their tape recorder. At other times they performed in music halls under the guise of a normal 'rock band', whereby the audiences felt fooled and once exposed to a hellish load of anti-pop noise, they started revolting. Very reminiscent of the fuss at the early Dada events. Their anti-conventional musical strategy not only attacked traditional song structures, but also the audience's ears, which were used to more harmonical scores. Over the years, their music became more structured, with the application of regular rhythms and repeated musical patterns that were mostly built around two consecutive tones. Music that was still filled with electronics and wherein choruses and bridges were still absent.³⁹

Throbbing Gristle (TG) used very similar methods: feeding sounds of instruments and voices into various electronic machines, thus achieving a wide, multi-layered range of distortions and effects. *Noise* and 'industrial' rhythms were the result (TG's music was the first to be labelled 'industrial'). Recording their playful improvisations directly, without structuring them into common song structures, TG wanted to avoid to sound like a regular rock band. They had no drummer, were unlearned as musicians, and addressed unconventional, taboo-breaking themes in the lyrics, that were driven by a fascination for 'evil'. Often, the lyrics were improvised; on stage and in the studio. The rise of punk rock was of no importance to the band. The singer Genesis P-Orridge thought punk was too



VIII. The Residents,
Autographed Photo, 1978.

traditional, and even too musical. He didn't appreciate the punk rock motto: 'Here's three chords... now start a band'. In contrast, he said: start a band with no chords, do whatever you want. Throbbing Gristle was *anti-music*. Nevertheless, their albums sound exciting. The soundscapes are varied and layered, machine-like rhythms create an industrial atmosphere, guitar and bass are played with a lot of echo and distortion. Their music was very loud and had changing frequencies that were meant to have a physical effect on the audience, which sometimes resulted in nausea or even epileptic attacks. Although the music did become more structured and accessible later on in their work, the ominous sounds, in combination with P-Orridge's melancholy voice, make TG's music indebted to Dada.⁴⁰

VII

Dadaist attitudes, thoughts, strategies, methods and work were continued in later periods and practices. I will now look into how these compare to the original Dada movements.

When in 1916 the word 'dada' was found among the artists of *Cabaret Voltaire*, it was against the background of the Great War, that had already led to millions of military and civilian victims. While these Zurich Dadaists were perhaps mostly thinking of exploring new directions in art practice – noting that immigrants in Switzerland were forbidden to show their political convictions at that time⁴¹ – the Berlin Dadaists were more politically engaged. They were opposed against the ruling class, that, as they saw, oppressed the working class. In the field of the arts, they addressed acclaimed, new artistic trends like Expressionism and Cubism, as well as the concept of 'art for art's sake'. Dada tackled 'high art' snobbery, the illusion of the so-called artist-genius and the commercial art world, as well as social and cultural conservatism in general – which they saw as responsible for the disastrous course of the war and the social circumstances thereafter. They showed an anti-art, anti-war and anti-bourgeoisie stance that was expressed in their work, including their music. Their works and words were, to a great extent, reactions to the historical contexts of their times. But not exclusively: Marcel Duchamp, for instance, would not have his creative thinking and subject matter be influenced or directed by socio-historical circumstances.

When Dada resurfaced in the 1950s, the historical context had changed completely. Society and technology had evolved, and a second World War had disrupted societies once again. When artists and musicians recurred to Dadaist methods, it was for the artistic approaches and methods in themselves. These practices in the fifties generally did not show a great commitment to address social circumstances. John Cage experimented and rebelled against conventional musical values, using non-musical principles as methods and non-artistic objects as tools and instruments, as well as the unconventionality and unpredictability of chance for his compositions. The same goes for Fluxus. No matter how 'Neo-Dada' this movement was – stressing the playful, nonsensical, non-artistic and banal of their performances and products – it did not involve much socio-political engagement.

The 'alternative' rock bands discussed here above, used different Dadaist approaches in their own way and time. Like the original Dadaists, they were critical of the establishment and generally orientated towards the political left. Sometimes they addressed specific social issues in their lyrics. But it was Frank Zappa in particular, who expressed a strong social critique by satirizing divergent and specific social issues. He addressed conservative American values and institutions, like the American school system, the consumerist culture in the United States, but also the smug doings of the hippie and freak subcultures of his times. Beyond the musical context, Zappa even waged legal battles over unjust power politics of conservative institutions.

The works and events of the original Dadaists, including their manifestos and other texts, were generally not taken seriously in their time. Most of their audiences and critics considered their work initially to be merely nonsense and cheeky rubbish. The public took Dadaist provocations either for granted, or responded with laughter. But more and more, as time progressed, the audiences responded with riot and protest to the Dadaist provocations. The Dada movement needed the public

participation to achieve their goals: to address social ills and misconceptions in art and society. Dadaist music was part of that strategy.

Thanks to the early Dada-historiographies by, above all, Dadaists Richard Huelsenbeck (1920)⁴² and Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes (1931)⁴³, as well as those by Georges Hugnet (1932-1934)⁴⁴, Dada was never forgotten as a movement. New York's Museum of Modern Art dedicated an overview of Dada in its 1936 exhibition *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*, which was accompanied by an extensive illustrated catalogue.⁴⁵ The public learned hereby mainly of Dada's achievements in the field of visual art. In that particular manner Dada returned in public awareness. However, it was not until the 1950's, that Dada's rebellious, anti-establishment stance was picked up again by, among others, the French Situationist International movement,⁴⁶ and by Fluxus, only a few years later. Dada had finally returned as an influential, anticonventional phenomenon, albeit mainly within the cultural field. In the visual arts it influenced most of the post-World War II tendencies in modern and contemporary art, such as Pop Art, Conceptual Art, Happenings and Art Performances, Nouveau Réalisme, Arte Povera, Zero and Postmodernism. Artists such as Jean Tinguely, Daniel Spoerri, Arman, Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol and Jeff Koons are much indebted to Dadaism and to Marcel Duchamp in particular.

The music of the rock bands I discussed in this paper, had a relatively small cult-following in underground circuits. Very much like Dada originally had functioned. It took a while before its musical value and its anticonventional expressiveness was recognised and appreciated by a wider audience. The music industry followed soon after that. Rebellious and innovative expressions and approaches in art, are often neglected. After losing their initial shock effects, it takes a while for them to become accepted and valued.

Dada's subversive, anarchic and humorous anti-conventionality is remembered to this day. But is its subversive power still recognised in the arts of the present? In today's technologically advanced times, in which the entertainment industry plays a dominant role and social media ensure the rapid spread of creative ideas, it seems increasingly difficult to distinguish oneself effectively. However, as history has showed, newly accepted cultural conventions are often met with new subversive cultural tendencies.

Overveen, The Netherlands

Notes

¹ Hugo Ball, from diary (*Die Flucht aus der Zeit*) entry Feb. 2, 1916, also press release for the opening of Cabaret Voltaire. Original announcement: 'Cabaret Voltaire. Unter diesem Namen hat sich eine Gesellschaft junger Künstler und Literaten etabliert, deren Ziel es ist, einen Mittelpunkt für die Künstlerische Unterhaltung zu schaffen. Das Prinzip des Kabarets soll sein, daß bei den täglichen Zusammenkünften musikalische und rezitatorische Vorträge der als Gäste verkehrenden Künstler stattfinden, und es ergeht an die junge Künstlerschaft Zürichs die Einladung, sich ohne Rücksicht auf eine besondere Richtung mit Vorschlägen und Beiträgen einzufinden'.

² At the opening night of Cabaret Voltaire on Feb.5, 1916, on the walls were works by Arp, Otto Baumberger, Giacometti, Edwin Keller, Leo Leuppi, Konrad Meili, Eli Nadelmann, Oppenheimer, Picasso, van Rees, Schlegel, Segal, Slodki, Henry Wabel. *Dada in Zürich*, p.85. In June, 1916, works by Arp, Paolo Buzzi, Francesco Canguillo, Corrado Govoni, Janco, Kissling, August Macke, Marinetti, Modigliani (portraits of Arp), Eli Nadelmann, Oppenheimer, Picasso, van Rees, Slodki, Segal and Wabel were exhibited. *Dada in Zürich*, p.87.

³ The first mentioning of the word 'dada' was in Ball's diary, entry April 18, 1916.

- ⁴ See Ball's introduction of May 15, 1916 to the *Cabaret Voltaire* magazine, p.5, for a short impression of Cabaret Voltaire's stage history; for details, p.32. See also Hentea, pp.63–78, for a more extensive history; Ingram, pp. 4–9.
- ⁵ In his diary entry of May 24, 1916, Ball discusses the irrational effects while dancing, caused by Marcel Janco's masks and the self-made costumes.
- ⁶ 'Dada kann Jeder'
- ⁷ 'Dilettanten erhebt Euch gegen die Kunst!'
- ⁸ *Dada in Zürich*, pp.85–87.
- ⁹ The 'Soirée Hans Heusser', the 6th Dada Soiree in Zurich, was held on May 25, 1917. *Dada in Zürich*, p.90.
- ¹⁰ Ingram, pp.7–8.
- ¹¹ Alvarez, pp.68–75; Füllner, pp.15–27.
- ¹² Ingram, pp.11–12; Bergius, p.338; p.220.
- ¹³ Hausmann, p.119.
- ¹⁴ The Six: a group of six composers with Satie initially as their patron: Georges Auric, Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc, Germaine Tailleferre.
- ¹⁵ Sanouillet, p.123.
- ¹⁶ The pianist was Marguerite Buffet, cousin of Picabia's wife Gabrielle Buffet.
- ¹⁷ Ingram, pp.16–19.
- ¹⁸ Marcel Duchamp had a Dadaist spirit, already before Dada. Nevertheless, he did not participate in any Dada movement, simply because he did not want to belong to any movement. See, a.o.: Tomkins, p.234; Cabanne, p.31.
- ¹⁹ Molderings, chapters 2–3 and passim.
- ²⁰ Stévance, p.2 and passim; James, pp.107–109.
- ²¹ Stévance, p.3 and passim; James, pp.107–109 and passim.
- ²² *Dada in Zürich*, p.60.
- ²³ Bergius, pp.338–339.
- ²⁴ Ingram, p.18; Sanouillet, pp.40–45. The singer was Hania Routchine; the composer Henri Duparc.
- ²⁵ Ingram, pp.12–13; *Wikipedia* (En.) entry for Erwin Schulhoff.
- ²⁶ Ingram, pp.13–14.
- ²⁷ Cage encountered the work of Marcel Duchamp already in the late 1920s, see, a.o., *Wikipedia* (En.) entry John Cage.
- ²⁸ Steve Marshall, John Cage's I Ching chance operations, <https://www.biroco.com/yijing/cage.html> 27–12–2021
- ²⁹ Greenbaum, section 'The Seeds for a Normative Dada' (unpaged); *Wikipedia* (En.) entry John Cage.
- ³⁰ Greenbaum, section 'Normative Dada's Legacy: Fluxus & Early Minimalism'; Sadowska, passim; *Fluxus!*, pp.8–11 and passim.
- ³¹ For the program, see *Fluxus!*, p.146.
- ³² Performance fragments in film registration 'Fluxus Festival (Wiesbaden 1962)' on YouTube.
- ³³ Sadowska, section '1.5 Nam June Paik, interactive art'.
- ³⁴ *Wikipedia* (En.) entries on Pierre Schaeffer and Musique Concrète; for Schaeffer's theories and methods, see (a.o.) Dack.
- ³⁵ A recommendation would be Zappa's autobiography, Zappa/Occhiogrosso.
- ³⁶ Reynolds, pp.247–251 (a.o.).
- ³⁷ Reynolds, pp.483–487 (a.o.).
- ³⁸ It was, in fact, Burroughs' close friend, the artist and writer Brion Gysin, who first (re)discovered the cut-up technique in the 1950's. Through Burroughs, though, it became popularized. Tristan Tzara published his 'How to Make a Dadaist Poem' as part 8 of his Dada manifesto *On Feeble Love and Bitter Love* (1920).
- ³⁹ Reynolds, pp.150–158 (a.o.).
- ⁴⁰ Reynolds, pp.224–240 (a.o.).
- ⁴¹ Hentea, pp.72–73.
- ⁴² Huelsenbeck, *Dada Almanach; En Avant Dada; Dada siegt!*
- ⁴³ Ribemont-Dessaignes in Motherwell.
- ⁴⁴ Hugnet in Motherwell.
- ⁴⁵ *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*, (ed. A.H. Barr Jr.) exh.cat. Museum of Modern Art, NY, 1936.
- ⁴⁶ a.o. *Wikipedia* entry Situationist International; Guy Debord, *La Société du spectacle*. Paris (Gallimard), 1967.

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Let's Listen to the Listener

PETER-JAN WAGEMANS

In 1972, the Danube Symposium on Neurology was held in Vienna. The topic was the “neurology of music”. This was the first occasion where this topic had been submitted for serious discussion, although the sedative and even therapeutic effects of music had already been a field of study before. This Symposium resulted, among other things, in a book with the title: *Music and the Brain*¹ for which several of the best scientists that were involved in the study produced articles.

Twenty years earlier, around the year 1952, the questions about the perception of what basically is art-music, had already been posed. But the people posing these questions came from another side of the spectrum of knowledge acquisition. Here it concerned professional musicians, and their leading research tools were mostly their own, well trained ears. They were part of the post-war generation, and were allergic to terms like inspiration, beauty and sentiments in general. Their paradigm was that music was organised sound, and that this artform, when manipulated in an intelligent way, was able to have an intelligent listener experience a high form of mental order. The listener could, through such an experience, even become a better person, achieving lucid insights in the structures of the surrounding social reality.

Consequently, in the beginning of the sixties attempts were made by artists of different disciplines to bridge the gap between science and art. Of course, art is not the same as science, and cannot do much with terms like value-free research – but many of these artists were curious about the possibility of a common ground. Was it possible that this would lead to superior results in art? The answer to this question, we can now see with some degree of certainty, is: No.

Modernist artists of those days, were often appalled by the often superficial and outmoded artistic choices where the ‘brainiacs’ came up with. Apparently scientific and artistic interests were not a natural combination. On the other hand, in the eyes of the scientists, the modernists achieved but meagre results when they used computation to create an ordering in their compositional work. And their calculation errors appeared to have no relevant consequences for the musical results. And more problematic was, for the scientists and composers alike: the errors that the composers made in their computation were irrelevant to the artistic quality of the music that was produced.

After the modernist movement had lost its dominance in the arts, there was room again to think about the perception of music in a less strict, rational way. Older questions came up again, like: Why is music capable of moving us? Why is it sometimes so full of an ecstatic beauty? Why is it capable to mean so much to us, when we, for instance, all of a sudden hear a tune we know? And why are all these emotions possible, even if we as listeners know almost nothing about the ‘clockwork’ that allows music to ‘tick’?

I was confronted, with all these questions by a simple remark, made by one of my professors. It was at the time I studied organ, composition and theory of music at the *Royal Conservatoire* in The Hague. This must have been around 1973. The professor’s remark was something along the following lines:

The only thing we are able to *know* about music is its organization. Music really is sound put in a specific order, waves of sound if you like, which we perceive, remember, and of which we appreciate the organization. All other ideas concerning music, the professor said, are based on associations – which only get in the way of pure musical perception.

At the time, I already felt his remark was wrong, but I could not yet say exactly why. Luckily, a few years later I took a cat, which helped me out.²

Most of the time, the cat was asleep. He lay in a chair in the room where I was working. He would sleep through my wild piano improvisations, just as he slept through the loud music playing from the speakers. I often wondered whether the cat was perhaps just a little hard of hearing, so at some point I decided to do an experiment. One morning, I played, very softly, a CD with bird sounds and all of a sudden the cat woke up and stealthily sneaked towards the speaker from which the sounds emanated. After having circled the speaker three times without finding any birds to chase after, he decided that something was going on here that was beyond his comprehension and he quietly walked back to his chair. And at that point I realised what had just happened. These bird sounds had been sent into the room from the speakers as physical vibrations, an objective result of the vibrations of the speaker cones. But only until they were picked up by my cat's ear. So, he was not deaf after all, he had definitely heard my music – but since the music had no meaning to him, he had ignored it and his brain somehow demoted it to mere background noise. Bird sounds however, appealed to his hunting instincts and therefore had meaning to the cat. Thus, he woke up and started his investigation.

So, now the question has been made clear: what is such meaning, how does it work? And is it possible to substitute this rather broad term with less elusive concepts?

Meaning

Let us now look at the process of the perception of music step by step. The first part of this journey is pretty straightforward: something makes the air particles move in rather complicated, multi-foam patterns. This is picked up by the ear and is brought to the attention of the brain as electric impulses. Which, in turn, starts to process them. And this is the point where it becomes complicated. For what is perception in this context? This is where confusion can arise, because there is a big difference between perceiving sound (“Hey, there’s noise coming from over there”) and *listening* to sound (“Hey, that’s somebody playing the clarinet”). When we are researching *listening* in this particular sense, we again must make a distinction. This time, between the comprehension of a trained listener³ and listening within more general frameworks. Within this article, I aim explicitly to look at that first type of listening. Listening, as the only entrance to music as an art form.

So what is listening? The ordering of sounds in a logically comprehensible pattern, as the professor I quoted earlier has said, is only a small part of the processing of sounds in the brain. This is because divergent parts of the brain, each with different and specific roles, play a part in our comprehension of perceptions in general. This includes the areas of the brain where emotions originate from and where memories are stored. Another complicating factor is that listening to music, as a time-based art, is completely dependent on a well-functioning short-term sound memory. That means, a memory, capable of storing and retrieving the logically comprehensible pattern of any given music. This labyrinth of perceptions, musical memory and the emotional household in the brain determines our understanding of music.

Fortunately, people are not all that different from each other. Mentally, we are much more alike than we perhaps are willing to admit, from our need for individuality. By this I intend that there are not really eight billion, entirely different ways of listening to a given piece of music. Apart from our individual competences and histories, such as our musical skills and personal backgrounds, there is a lot to say about the way people listen to music in general terms. So, let us take a closer look at the listener in general: How is music understood?

In order to answer this question, we will access three areas of study:

Cognitive neuroscience of music: This is the discipline that studies the mechanism by which our brain recognises, perceives, understands and performs music.

Recognition of music within a system of social values: Music is here linked to its social function, it concerns the musical languages that are applied and developed, the musical traditions and their evolution, and the way music is appreciated and used in today’s society.

Music understood from an individual perspective: Understanding of music through personal memories and the emotional relations that are construed between pieces of music and our personal memories.

Cognitive Neuroscience of Music

Music is capable of causing evident changes in the neurovascular system. Some of its building blocks can provoke strong emotional reactions, think of people holding their hands over their ears for protection to loud or sharp sounds. The most striking example of musical movements that can cause such a response is (loud) dissonance.

The most striking change in 20th-century music is the recalibration of the consonance/dissonance relationship. Up until the 20th century, dissonance was what spiced things up: without a good handling of dissonances, a composition was not good. It was the main expressive tool in musical composition, the natural expression for pain, for fear or sorrow. Within the Modernistic movement that started around the first World War, this 'spice' transformed from a means of expression to the default harmonic language. But for many listeners of that time, this emancipation of the dissonant was like having salt rubbed into their wounds. Composers like *Arnold Schönberg*, founder of the second Viennese School in the 1920's, were rather dismissive of this public rejection of their application of dissonances in their work. They thought it was perhaps just a matter of getting used to, or of simply teaching audiences to 'listen better'. But to this day, music in which dissonance is used as the main harmonic building block, without a special emotional purpose (as is done in scores to horror films), is not popular.

A pure physical explanation was given by *Hermann von Helmholtz* (1821–1894). He states, that the dissonant is a sound which cannot be processed correctly by the human ear and therefore has the association with feelings that cannot be processed easily.⁴ Helmholtz explains the 'unpleasant' character of dissonance as beatings⁵ between two simultaneous tones. When two root tones or overtones are within a critical bandwidth of each other, the beat causes the two tones to sound dissonant. Helmholtz called this: *rough sound*. For instance, the semitone $b'-c''$ is $528 \text{ Hz} - 495 \text{ Hz} = 33 \text{ Hz}$ or beatings per second. As result of these beatings, the tones themselves cannot coexist in the ear, without 'disturbing' each other's behaviour. They mutually check each other's uniform flow.

Helmholtz makes a reasonable case for the difference in perception of consonance and dissonance having a physical basis in biology. In this context he suggests that the neurology of our sense of hearing is not capable to properly process the beating within a certain bandwidth, because the two tones are constantly and strongly influencing each other. Or, is it simply a matter of getting used to as Schönberg suggested?

This suggestion of Schönberg brings us to the Nature/Nurture debate: the debate about whether an ability comes at birth by genetic inheritance or that it is acquired by education. Especially in the 1960s this was heated debate, especially when concerning sexual taboos and criminal behaviour. Both were often ascribed to a suppressive socialisation. Brain studies that I have consulted,⁶ seem to suggest that today, Nature has won the argument in most cases.

Studies among children⁷ between the ages of 6 to 10 months old, have shown that children of that age can already detect interval changes in short melodies. It is highly unlikely that children have already acquired musical knowledge at this early age. They are presumably still unaware of the musical conventions in Western culture. Both children and adults, as the studies showed, detect interval changes more easily when the relationships are simple, such as in a fifth (3:2) or a fourth (4:3), than when they are complicated, like in a tritone (45:32). The consonant intervals are not only processed more easily, but also influence the attention and the mood of the child that is listening. Music (for example, the mother singing) has a positive influence on the mood of babies. Research has shown that cortisone levels drop when a baby hears its mother singing. Apparently, music does this more effectively than speech. These research results suggest that children do not start life as musical *tabula rasa*. They are *predisposed* to notice and pay attention to melodies and rhythms in musical

patterns. They are attuned to consonant patterns, both melodic and harmonic, and to metric rhythms. Such predispositions confirm the existence of a biological basis for human musical perception, in the sense of understanding. They are specific for the ability that forms the basis of musical skill for people *from all cultures*.

Equally compelling are the results of the research done on animals.⁸ Most young animal behaviour is not learned but appears to be the result of congenital imprints. One might say: pieces of a *collective memory*, that are present in the animals brain. For instance, young rabbits react fearfully to seeing the silhouette of a bird of prey; this fear subsequently urges them to flee and seek shelter. The young rabbits show this reaction of fear even if they had never yet encountered a bird of prey. Since the human brain biologically doesn't function differently than the brains of animals, we perhaps may assume the existence of certain *congenital imprints* in the human brain as well. Imprints which can be triggered by sounds and therefore also by music.

So, we need to look at the brain again and especially to the part where we process our emotions. Unfortunately, neurological research does not provide us with any clear-cut answers. Little is known as yet, about the neural processing of dissonant intervals. As it is, we only know for sure what parts of the brain react to dissonant sounds: we find these brain regions in the *amygdala*, a core of nerve cells that play a central part in processing revolting stimuli and in regulating fear. The function of another lobe in the processing of emotions, deep in the brain: the *gyrus parahippocampalis*, is less direct. This brain organ is part of the limbic system, where most of our emotional life can be traced back to. The right *gyrus parahippocampalis* and the right *precuneus* play a part in learning and memorising, but also in emotional processing.⁹ Yet there is no viable research that indicates a clear neurological relation between emotions and dissonances.

But there is yet a different way to approach the consonant/dissonant dilemma. Composers started to write more often dissonant music from 1910 onward. Perhaps they were forced by a strong urge to express the dissonances and agitations of their time: the First World War was about to start and all the subsequent misery resulted in the Second World War. How can an artist ignore that suffering! This line of reasoning may be traced back to the philosopher George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.¹⁰ Hegel writes about a development towards absolute freedom and truth of a reasoned *world spirit* or *world soul* (*Weltgeist*). This collective human evolution is caused by struggle. To put it simply: the history of humanity is like a slaughterhouse, wherein everything happens in order to reach this ultimate goal. The *World Spirit* is the secret mission of history. The relevance of the Arts to this evolutionary process consists of its autonomy, its freedom of thought. Art is not a servant, it doesn't serve as entertainment, decoration or other. Art is the free expression of thought. The outward appearance of Art is not an irrelevant, meaningless illusion – but an appearance inherent to truth itself, comparable to the shadows in Plato's cave. The task Art has, according to Hegel, is no less than to make reality as truth visible in a sensory form. The true artist must be convinced that his absolute mission is to express the essence of his time. So, in a century that contains two World Wars, music cannot be pleasant.

From the perspective of the artist, however, this claim is untenable. Composers may have suffered under the circumstances of their time as human beings, but this doesn't mean they had to express that in their work. Composers, like the visual artists before them, were attracted to the new artistic languages because of the new possibilities these brought for doing art. For some it meant an important shift in their careers. If there is something like a *World Spirit*, it may well have been a spirit of optimism that gave rise to dissonant music: the new music would soon conquer concert halls and leave the old, dusty musical traditions behind. Schönberg never mentioned any connection between his music and the political situation of his day – though he served some time in the army during the First World War. He wrote:

'The insight, that consonance and dissonance differ not as opposites do, but only in point of degree; that consonances are the sounds closer to the fundamental (Root tone), dissonances those further

away; that their comprehensibility is graduated accordingly, since the nearer ones are easier to comprehend than those further off¹¹

I must conclude that in the physical perception of dissonant and consonant tones differences can be found that explain the associations with pleasant and unpleasant feelings. However, art is not reality, and the portrayal of pain in music is something completely different to the pain that is perceived in one's own body. Art is a game, from which the participants can escape without harm and that makes the pain that was experienced in it an aesthetic 'pleasure'.

Music Understood from a System of Social Values

Let's have a closer look at the topic of the recognition of music within a value system that is accepted within a specific culture. In this area of study, we may distinguish three models.¹² Following Carl G. Jung¹³, I call these models: 'musical archetypes'. An archetype is an idealised primal model that serves as the basis of later variants. According to Jung, such a model is present in man's subconscious as a symbolic representation. An archetype is often linked to emotion as well, such as the archetype of the Mother, or: the Sad Clown.

The First Archetype: Telling Stories

People love stories. They like telling and passing on traditions, legends, ballads about life, about love and war, the past (both the actual past or a fictitious past), and the future (based on either realistic or imaginary expectations). Religious cultures, for instance, have story telling at their basis. Nowadays, this general appetite for stories is satisfied by an unending stream of films and television series.

Since centuries ago, narration was linked to music. In the Ancient Mediterranean civilisation, the Greek *rhapsodists* were of great renown as singers/narrators of the Homeric epic poems. In the Celtic world there were the *bards* and in other parts of Northern Europe the era of the *scops* and *skalds* comes to mind. In China, the art of storytelling has been around for thousands of years as well. But today, it is no longer the nomadic singer/actor/instrumentalist that preserves this popular tradition, but it has become a state-controlled form of culture. In the Soviet Union a similar tradition was very much alive in the Ukraine particularly, before Stalin put a stop to it by having all the so-called *kobzars* massacred in 1932.¹⁴

These early types of narrative music always take the same form: a singer or actor tells a story, accompanied by a musical instrument played by an instrumentalist or played by himself. This later grew out into a group of multiple instruments and, taking a great leap in time, this leads us to today's pop music – with its endless stories on the theme of 'boy meets girl'.

In classical music the link between storytelling and music took an important turn when the singer was replaced by an instrumentalist, to tell the story. This happened in the early *Renaissance*. When exactly is unclear, but it probably happened in a home setting, where it was customary to make transcriptions of *frotolos*—madrigals and chansons—for strings, flutes, lute, or clavier.¹⁵ Various forms that originally were developed to tell a narration, thus became purely musical forms. These song-forms evolved into the *sonata*, the *fantasia*, the *toccata* and from there on to the classic and romantic sonata and symphony.

This implies, that the musical language in which these musical forms are written apply a large number of formulas or gestures that suggest an emotion – or for a better word: an affect. In its most worked out form we find this in the *Affektenlehre*,¹⁶ which highpoint of development is found in the *Baroque* era. The narrative quality of music in the *Classical* and *Romantic* period is still founded on this *Affektenlehre*, although this is never specifically mentioned by composers, because by that time, it already had become an integral part of the abstract musical language that composers took for granted.

The archetype of music as narrative is the most important and most beloved form of music. Even the abstract form of the fugue has always been a game of multiple characters or elements, chasing

after each other around a musical theme. The later form of the symphony has all the traits of a narrative too. A concert hall, where an audience gathers to listen to an extremely narrative *Mahler* symphony or to the symphonic poems of *Richard Strauss*, is in fact a scaling-up of the small group of listeners that had once gathered around a single singer, about to amuse them with a narrative in song.

The Second Archetype: Music for Dance

The connection between the immediate physical sensation of a musical pulse and the bodily energy it creates, is obvious. Ballet has been a vital part of the palette of classical music for centuries. Nowadays, music for dancing or just leaping about is a major commercial activity, expressed in a whole range of popular styles, such as *Dance*, *Disco* and *House* and evidenced by the wealth of certain DJs, who have succeeded in bringing large masses to ecstasy with their music. In the post-war Avant-Garde however, where metric patterns are usually avoided, this archetype has all but disappeared.

The motoric aspect of music has a direct influence on our bodies, as demonstrated by G. and H. *Harrer's* experiments (*In Music and the Brain*):

'While the subject listens to a record of dance music the effect of the music goes, so to speak, "into the legs"; muscle action potentials increase sharply in the legs and relatively slightly in the frontalis muscles. A reverse effect is found during a silent arithmetical task, when there is a greater increase of muscular activity in the region of the brow than in the legs. Listening to *Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 6* enhances crural and, to a somewhat lesser degree, frontalis muscular activity. With temporary marked augmentation of the sound volume a very pronounced increase of muscle action potentials in both leg and forehead was noted. The subject had been asked not to move during the test and there was no muscular movement as far as one could judge from observation, even at the height of the EMG¹⁷ discharges. A simultaneous recording of body movements showed no response.'¹⁸

When a pianist listens to piano music, his *motor cortices* is activated. It is possible to see this happening without the use of any EMG technique.

The direct relation between music and the physical response is also noted by the musicologist *Curt Sachs*¹⁹, who subdivides dancing by 'primitive' people in *convulsive dancing* (non-motoric movements, which he regards as being in disharmony with the body and therefore evoking a special tension and expression in the eye of the spectator) and in *expansive dancing*, that finds its origin in an irrepressible urge to express oneself motorically (dancing in harmony with the body; dances that evoke great energy in the spectator).

The Third Archetype: Creation of Mystic Space

In various cultures we may find music that is based on long, sustained sounds, that in a certain sense interfere with each other, that has a religious or mystical context. One may experience this well-known phenomenon of interference in large, acoustically rich spaces. Romanesque, and especially Gothic churches provided medieval listeners with an overwhelming listening experience. The sound of religious chanting in such buildings, seems to be coming from all directions, filling the entire church. In the Middle Ages, such a mystical experience was nowhere else to be found – apart from the occasional cave – because cathedrals were the largest buildings of that time. The interfering sounds may have given the medieval listener with a feeling of security and awe: this is where God lives.

In general, interference evokes happy and calm moods in people. It has been suggested that this is related to our foetal state in the wombs of our mothers. The foetus experiences sound in this particular manner, because all sound is distorted by the amniotic fluids. Interesting in this regard is the huge success in the Netherlands of *Canto Ostinato* (1976–79), a piece of minimal music in mobile form for one to four keyboard instruments by *Simeon ten Holt* (1923–2012). Groups of admirers frequently attend performances of this work, which may last from between one to up to four hours, depending on the number of repetitions applied. The fans often lie down on mattresses on the floor and sometimes even assume a foetal position.

In churches today, the *voix celeste* can still be heard. This is an organ register consisting of two pipes per key that are slightly out of tune with each other. Choirs and string ensembles are also known for their soothing effect on our mental condition. Here, the interference is produced by a group of singers or string players, all producing the same tone at once. Since it is physically impossible to produce a tone with perfect accuracy, there will always be a little difference between tones each participant produces, thus producing interference. Also the use of vibrato produces interference. One can experience this phenomenon by taking a small sinus generator and moving it quickly in circles. The Doppler effect will produce a multiple of related, but differing sinuses, with interference as a result. This principle is used in old-school electronic organs to produce a friendly, full sound.

Conclusion

In general, the appreciation and understanding of music is strongly linked to the immediate recognisability of the three aforementioned archetypes. The sooner an archetype is recognised in a musical performance, the easier the communication between the music and listener is established. This power of communication brings a risk with it to music as an art form. Namely: music proves to be capable in manipulating the emotional state of the listener in the aforementioned ways. And that is made use of frequently in commercial music, military music, and film scores. I often refer to these types of music as '*exploitation*' music, in contrast to what the serious composer strives for: the '*exploration*' of music. In practice, these two aspects often mix, although it makes a huge difference which starting position an composer chooses: to be an '*exploiter*' or an '*explorer*'.

And yet another conclusion must be drawn here: the more abstract music becomes, in the sense that it detaches itself from its archetypical model, the more it becomes suited to the experienced, informed listener. From the second half of the eighteenth century onwards, academic circles have attached more and more value to abstraction and it became the main criterion for High or—as Mozart said—*gelehrte* art.

Perception and Recognition of Music through Personal Memories

For an art form that can only be perceived in time (unfolding over a period of time), a well-functioning memory capacity is vital. Musical experience does not offer much more than a memory, an experience that is laid out in time. As we know, our memory capacity has two important components: the short term memory and long term memory. Especially for music, as an art form wherein the immediate perception and understanding is constantly related to already heard and remembered listening experiences, from both immediate and long term past, the way these two types of memory capacities are intertwined is of great importance. As we may know, the long term memory capacity can be unreliable, as many recorded cases of 'false memory' have shown, especially in court cases²⁰. One of the reasons for this is that our memory may be 'polluted' with all sorts of subjective, emotional information, which distort the factual recollection of objective events. For the noble art of music, this means that fragments of music can fasten themselves to personal memories of happy or sad times, mostly of a very situational character. So, when we listen to music at a certain moment in our lives, the short term memory capacity allows us to follow and understand that music in the same way we can understand a sentence and a 'text' in spoken language. But the intertwining of the short term and the long term memory capacity makes it difficult for us (in fact harder than in the case of spoken languages) to just listen to the actual music presented at that moment. And since music and emotions are by nature closely related, we thus may burst out into tears while listening to a certain piece of music, because it reminds us of a particular time in our lives. The intertwining of the two memory capacities build up a metaphorical *slide* in us, on which we glide towards different parts of our emotional memory archive. Sometimes there is no stopping this from happening, even if the music which triggers it, is by nature not very special in any way.

The Need for Meaning

We have now seen that there are specific cognitive and neurological processes in the human brain that respond in a defined manner to music. We may view these functions as a basic, biological sensitivity to sound. But sound, which consists exclusively of sonic phenomena – such as: metre, longevity, sustain, the sound of vacuum cleaners, thunder, the sea or sounds produced during orgasm – is generally not yet experienced as *music*. For that to become possible, we need the two other phenomena that I pointed to: the recognition of a narration, either in the form of story, dance or mystical events – and the functioning of our short term and long term memory. Within the latter two phenomena, the two types of memory, the concept of musicality can also be found.

A trained listener has developed a profound focus on the length and the detail of sounds. For humans, it is important that this focus provides us with information. In the event that this focus yields little references to what the listener knows of already, the listener will create his own meaning, which may very well be far removed from the composer's intentions. But in the best case, the listener will come some way towards the composer and use his own musicality to interpret the piece of music. It is fair to conclude that the final shape of a composition is formed, not just by the composer, but by the listener as well – using his, her or their entire personality.

This means that skill, knowledge and attitude are learned assets that make the understanding of a complex and serious piece of music possible. What the listener lacks in knowledge and skill may be learned if her, his or their *attitude* provides for that. In other words: a listener needs to be convinced that a piece of music can be understood as meaningful – and a listener needs to be eager to learn to understand what is done in that piece. This concerns in large the *form* of the piece and the way that form develops what has been done before in earlier pieces. The form itself, is also intelligible and open to a certain logic – even if it concerns 'abstract' notes that are produced by musical instruments that have no other meaning than being musical instruments. Here I am thinking of the narrative, the development, of the form in itself.

This also means, that the listener projects her, his or their own experiences, and what was learned from them, onto the perceived music. The memory of a personal history may be activated and re-actualized by the movements of the musical piece. This is rather difficult to pin down in general terms, and there may well be a certain subjectivity in the way this process happens. But there is also a quality in this activation of the personal and individual, that is really a shared understanding in all human beings. Herewith, I intend the way that certain qualities of musical structures, such as the interference that I have looked into here above, are understood by everybody in a manner that is much alike. In the experience of the feelings that such a quality of sound provokes in all, personal, subjective memories may be activated as well. For instance, feelings of belonging when one went to Church with one's parents when one was a child. Or the qualities of a grand sound that can, in a rather abstract sense, be related to wide and fast landscapes.

So, the autonomous qualities that are developed in the musical form, are connected to other pieces of music (the musical practice) and to general and personal experiences. The faculty of memory and the faculty of imagination are both activated whilst listening to, moreover comprehending, musical work. Next to the logic of the musical structures and the development they undergo during the performance of the piece, that is grasped.

Returning to the question I proposed in the introduction of this paper: What is meaning, how does it work? And is it possible to substitute this rather broad term with less elusive concepts?

Meaning appears to have a multifaceted quality. It appears in this paper as a structure that is built from many, rather unequal aspects: the neuro-biological, the cognitive and the psychological, as well as a historical, cultural phenomenon. There are biological, physical qualities that simply occur in our bodies and brains when we hear music. These occurrences are of such a quality, that it is fair to say they concern a deep, emotional experience of our existence. Of our being there. These responses are shared by individuals in all times and relate us to what is around us as well – to what exists like us. The cognitive aspects concern reason and logic, the recognition of patterns and their

developments. But also knowledge and skills, everything that we have learned as 'cultured' beings. Meaning, what we have learned about musical history, of the past and of the world nearby and far. In a more or less argumentative manner, relations are established between qualities of what is heard in music and to what we know of and understand. When we take the psychological aspects in account, the cognitive becomes related to the emotional and the personal experience.

So, meaning can be looked at from different angles, be approached from divergent aspects. I here propose that meaning is an umbrella term, that houses different aspects in it. Really, it can be approached as a structure of relations that are established from divergent perspectives: the neurobiological, the cognitive, the psychological and the historical. When it comes to comprehending a complex piece of music, that is in itself a structure made up of meaningful relations, the form and its developments need to become related to the listener's personality and knowledge. That is why, if we want to find the meaning of a musical piece, we must start by listening to the listener. And after all, the composer is just the first listener. The musicians, that perform the piece, are the second listeners. We are all listening. Only when we listen we may see.

Dordrecht, The Netherlands

Notes

- ¹ Macdonald Critchley and R.A. Henson, *Music and the Brain*, William Heinemann Medical Books, London, 1977.
- ² Peter-Jan Wagemans, *The Big Composers Cookery Book*, Deussmusic, The Hague, 2021, Chapter 1.
- ³ I am not referring to a listener with a theoretical knowledge of music. I mean, comparatively speaking, an experienced restaurant visitor, who does not know the recipes for what he is eating.
- ⁴ Herman von Helmholtz, *Die Lehre von den Tonempfindung als Physiologische Grundlagen für die Theorie der Musik*, Fr. Vieweg und Sohn, Braunschweig, 1896.
- ⁵ In acoustics, a beat is an interference pattern between two sounds of different frequencies whose rate is the difference or sum of the two frequencies. Within the sounding of two tones, consonant or dissonant, these beatings always occur as a natural result, together with the two tones forming the interval.
- ⁶ Ben van Cranenburgh, *Muziek en Brein*, Stichting ITON, Haarlem, 2018.
Critchley Macdonald and R.A. Henson: *Music and the Brain*, William Heinemann Medical Books, London, 1977.
Oliver Sachs, *Musophilosophy, tales of Music and the Brain*, Alfred A Knopf, New York, 2007.
- ⁷ Laurel Trainor and Becky Heinmiller: "Infants prefer to listen to consonance over dissonance" in *Infant Behaviour Development* 21 December 1998, p. 77-88. DOI:10.1016/S0163-6383(98)90055-8.
- ⁸ See Ethology in https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethology#Fixed_action_patterns.
- ⁹ Maaïke van Boven: *Actieve hersendelen bij de perceptie van dissonante muzikale intervallen*, 2012. <https://www.scribd.com/document/80189111/Actieve-hersendelen-bij-de-perceptie-van-dissonante-muzikale-intervallen>.
Gavin M. Bidelman and Ananthanarayan Krishnan, "Neural correlates of consonance, dissonance, and the hierarchy of musical pitch in the human brainstem", *The Journal of Neuroscience*, October 2009, p. 5-8.
- ¹⁰ A.A. van den Braembussche, *Denken over kunst*, uitgeverij Coutinho, Bussum 1994/2012, Chapter 7: *The End of Art: The Contemporary Interest in Hegel*.
- ¹¹ Arnold Schönberg, *Opinion or Insight? in Style and Idea*, edited by Leonard Stein, St Martin's Press, New York, 1975 p. 260-261.
- ¹² Peter-Jan Wagemans: *The Big Composers Cookery Book*, Deussmusic, The Hague, 2021, Chapter 1.
- ¹³ Carl G. Jung, *Archetypus*, Racher Verlag, Zürich, 1954.
- ¹⁴ Peter-Jan Wagemans, *The Big Composers Cookery Book*, Deussmusic, The Hague, 2021, Chapter 1.
- ¹⁵ Marcel Boereboom, *Handboek van de muziekgeschiedenis*, de Nederlandse boekhandel, Antwerpen, 1958.
- ¹⁶ Hans-Heinrich Unger: *Die Beziehungen zwischen Musik und Rhetorik im 16.-18. Jahrhundert*. Triltsch, Würzburg, 1941.
- ¹⁷ EMG: electromyography, with which the electrical activity of the muscles is measured.
- ¹⁸ Macdonald Critchley and R.A. Henson: *Music and the brain*, William Heinemann Medical Books, London, 1977, p. 214.
- ¹⁹ Curt Sachs, *de Geschiedenis van de dans*, Het Spectrum, Utrecht, 1969, p. 24-56.
- ²⁰ <https://www.verywellmind.com/the-consequences-of-false-memories-2795350>.

Metafiction toward a Literary Hyperreality: Post-modernist Textual Strategies in Martin Amis's *Money*

BOWEN WANG

Martin Amis's 1984 novel *Money: A Suicide Note*¹ meaningfully explores the social and cultural backdrop of the late twentieth century. It delineates economic globalization, materialist over-indulgence, and individual consumerism at the beginning of the Thatcher-Reagan period. The protagonist, John Self, even confesses being an addict of the twentieth century.² Understanding his obsession with the given cultural background could be a way to help us interpret both the textual and contextual dilemmas that not only he, but also the author and their contemporaneous readers, faced at that time. His addiction mainly concerns the newly emerging type of economic order and social life, that is characterized by a postmodern culture of "fragmentary sensations, eclectic nostalgia, disposable simulacra and promiscuous superficiality."³ The traditional values of identity, presence, authenticity, historical progression, and cognitive certainty are fundamentally challenged by, and removed from the new culture of this epoch.

Under these conditions, which may well be recognized as postmodern conditions, Amis's *Money* gives a striking response to the essence of these problematic concepts by questioning the univocity of meaning and interpretation. He did this by starting an inner dialog among the author, character, and reader. This metafictional narrative parallels the "finance capital's disregard for the real and literary language's disregard for referentiality,"⁴ and further echoes a Baudrillardian hyperreality. Both socially and literarily, nothing but a random swirl of empty signs appears in the operation of symbolic exchanges, together with a disbelief in the underlying boundary between fiction and reality, as well as an indeterminacy of value, significance, and absolute truth. This study employs the theoretical frameworks of Patricia Waugh's metafiction and Jean Baudrillard's hyperreality to discuss the innovative and complex structure of Amis's *Money*.⁵ Any fixed meaning or absolute way of interpreting the work should be disrupted and subsequently reconstructed into a postmodern epistemology. As a metafiction, *Money*, establishes a literary hyperreality, destabilizing and substituting conventional ways of understanding the relationship between the author, text, reader, and the socio-cultural reality, with multiple meanings and possibilities.

Amis's Authorial Intrusion and Doubling

Patricia Waugh defines metafiction as a "theory of fiction through the practice of [systematically] writing fiction," so as to "pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality."⁶ It is mainly concerned with the self-consciousness of the work's status as fiction, as an artefact, but also with starting a frame-breaking conversation between the imagined, fictional and the perceptible worlds. Metafiction can be read as a "borderline discourse"⁷ between literary and critical theories. However, it is also, and perhaps foremost, a "metalepsis"⁸ of different narrative levels between fiction and reality. It attempts to examine a postmodern sense of "reality," one that is based on a linguistic system in which human knowledge and experience are consistently reflected, mediated, and produced.

Linda Hutcheon considers this metafictional narrative as a new force to transform the conventional, self-centered, autonomous authorial production toward a cooperative process between the writer and reader. The metafictional process aims to reestablish literature as the "challenge of read-

ing as a cooperative, interpretative experience.⁹ Metafictional writing can actively encourage contemporary readers to discern new modes of meaning and interpretation, because they

tend to be constructed on the principle of a fundamental and sustained opposition: the construction of a fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and the laying bare of that illusion. In other words, the lowest common denominator of metafiction is simultaneously to create a fiction and to make a statement about the creation of that fiction. The two processes are held together in a formal tension which breaks down the distinctions between 'creation' and 'criticism' and merges them into the concepts of 'interpretation' and 'deconstruction'.¹⁰

As a typical sample of metafiction, Amis's *Money*, violates traditional, realistic narrative levels by involving the intrusive author that doubles as a fictional character, who directly addresses the reader. Thus, the novel provides a parallel reading of both postmodernist structures of narrative – and social critiques of late capitalism.¹¹

One of the self-conscious, self-reflexive manners of metafiction revealed in Amis's *Money* is the authorial presence, serving as a fictional character in the novel and an author-surrogate. John Self employed Martin Amis (the character) to work as a scriptwriter for his new film to be named *Good Money* or *Bad Money*, referring to the title of the actual novel. Self did not realize until over the game of chess near the end that he, himself, was in fact a fictional character that had been literally shaped and constructed by the Martin Amis figure. The characterization of the two characters represents two opposing attitudes toward the condition of postmodernity in the late-capitalist society, against a backdrop of the individualist consumer culture featuring "global tinnitus, temporal disorientation, and psychic fragmentation."¹² For instance, their living habits and lifestyles are poles apart. Compared to Self, who described himself as "200 pounds of yob genes, booze, snout, and fast food" obsessed with "sex shows, space games, slot machines, video nasties, nude mags, drink, pubs, fighting, television, handjobs,"¹³ Amis, the fictional character, is an embodiment of an ascetic literariness and fierce loyalty to high culture by speaking of his Franklinesque daily agenda:¹⁴

'...I get up at seven and write straight through till twelve. Twelve to one I read Russian poetry – in translation, alas. A quick lunch, then art history until three. After that it's philosophy for an hour – nothing technical, nothing *hard*. Four to five: European history, 1848 and all that. Five to six: I improve my German. And from then until dinner, well, I just relax and read whatever the hell I like. Usually Shakespeare.'¹⁵

This antithetic pair of the author-surrogate and John Self initially emerges as a reinforcement of Amis's sociocultural critique of the materialist excess and spiritual bareness, especially under the dehumanizing impact of a culture of commodification and a post-industrial democracy. However, Self also recognized the problem with himself: "I've got to get this stuff out of my system. No, more than that, much more. I've got to get my system out of my system. That's what I've got to do."¹⁶ Recognizing the problem and not being able to do anything about, it appears to be a key tension in the novel. Perhaps it comes down to the postmodern conditions of the late twentieth century, to which Self is addicted: "I am addicted to the twentieth century."¹⁷ The dramatically sarcastic decadence and the victimization of Self in his role of a philistine hostile to high culture and art, opts to be a broad representation of each prisoner of this historical moment. Self is addicted to a culture of commodification and of mass mechanical reproductions in every realm of human experience, which has invaded its consciousness, eroded its perspectives, and undermined its ability to find a solution to its self-destruction. In the novel, Martin Amis's textural intrusion further intensifies this loss of subjectivity. James Diedrick regards this phenomenon as a "cultural complicity" of the postmodern condition in *Money*, though not controlled by an Orwellian government or a Kafkaesque bureaucracy of totalitarian ideology, in respectively *1984* or *The Trial*. This complicity is somewhat constrained by "an equally powerful economic system that shapes individual subjectivities, fetishizes objects, and commodifies relationships."¹⁸

The ambivalent and intricate relationship between Self and the fictional Amis is also identified by their mirroring representation, through the lens of doubling. In addition to Amis's creation of a recurring author-figure, this pair of characters share an astonishing degree of parallel backgrounds and experiences: they both grew up in the postwar Western culture from the 1950s to the 1960s and are both involved in the cinematic business on the other side of the Atlantic.¹⁹ Moreover, both had an Oedipal relationship with their fathers. At their first meeting in the pub, which Self believed he would ultimately inherit from his father, Barry Self (unfortunately he eventually won nothing but a paternal disownment), he asked Amis the character: "Your dad, he's a writer too, isn't he? Bet that made it easier." However, Amis's ironic response was "Oh, sure. It's just like over the family pub."²⁰ Like the troubled, violent affinity between John and Barry Self, Amis also experienced "envious accusations of nepotism and favoritism and public criticism from Kingsley Amis, who called his son's novels unreadable."²¹ This doubling of the anxiety of their paternal influences alludes to a consistent struggle for the identification and liberation from inborn patriarchy.

Another doubling in *Money* appears in the "nomenclature"²² of the fictional Martin Amis in London and Martina Twain, "twain" being an archaic term for two, in New York. Amis and Twain can be interpreted as different sides of "a single consciousness"²³ or an "alter ego"²⁴ of each other. Before meeting them, Self disliked reading any fiction or other books: "But novels...they're all long, aren't they? I mean, they're all so *long*."²⁵ He then starts to learn to read, contemplate, and appreciate literature and art of high culture, as a potential cure saving him from the degraded commercialization and voracious capitalism. Twain works as the good, kind-hearted aspect of the author, a cultural tutor, offering Self the "how-to kit for the twentieth century"²⁶ through the canonical works of George Orwell, Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, and Albert Einstein. Twain is different from other female characters in the novel, like Selina Street – who merely acts as the identity of commodified sexuality for the male protagonist. She seems to be "a woman of somewhere else" and Self even "can't find a voice"²⁷ talking with her, within his shallow, limited mindset of pornographic language and sexual motif. During the time of these "literary lectures" with Twain, the self-reflexivity of *Money* appears as fiction about writing fiction. It incorporates many discussions of reading, literary theory, and criticism in the form of a metafictional commentary. For instance, Self once misheard the word of "genre or mainstream" as "John roar mainstream,"²⁸ which he mistook as referring to his ignorance of literature and lack of reading, that – from his viewpoint – is a detrimental and treacherous act:

I don't know what it's like to write a poem. I don't know what it's like to read one either...About me and reading (I don't really know why I tell you this – I mean, do you read that much?): I can't read because it hurts my eyes. I can't wear glasses because it hurt my nose. I can't wear contacts because it hurts my nerves. So you see, it all came down to a choice between pain and not reading. I chose not reading. Not reading – that's where I put my money.²⁹

After Twain introduced him to reading literary and philosophical works, Self started to realize that reading, as a way of obtaining knowledge, imagination, and critical thinking, can refresh one's mind and even cure his tinnitus:

The big thing about reading and all that is – you have to be in a fit state for it. Calm. Not picked on. You have to be able to hear your own thoughts, without interference. On the way back from lunch (I walked it) already the streets felt a little lighter. I could make a little more sense of the watchers and the watched.³⁰

More importantly, Twain, or the subconscious of the author, intend to assist Self to be aware of his fictitious existence and "his subordination amidst the machinations of the artist figure,"³¹ when talking about esthetics in terms of perception, representation, and truth. She attempted to preclude him from being a sad, unwitting narrator, endangered by "the vulnerability of a figure unknowingly watched, the difference between a portrait and an unposed study."³² Still, she could by no means

succeed since Self, the reluctant narrator, was trapped in a money conspiracy or, in a broader sense, the cultural complicity conditioned by the sensual indulgence and intellectual blindness of consumer individualism, all emblematic of the historical deadlock in which he was caught.

Metafictional Commentary and Character-Reader Interaction

The complex interplay between literary criticism and the practice of literature is another striking characteristic of metafiction as a mode of postmodernist writing, in line with what Mark Currie terms “theoretical fiction” in *Postmodern Narrative Theory*.³³ Modernism and postmodernism exhibit an identical awareness of the twentieth-century revolution of language and representation, and both assert the productive power of the human mind in the face of social disorder. Nevertheless, compared with the fashion of contemporary metafiction, modernist self-consciousness only “draw[s] attention to the aesthetic construction of the text”³⁴ and cannot reflect the status of a fiction as an artefact. As a further step, postmodernists focus on the act of writing itself, instead of literary consciousness or esthetic autonomy, fundamentally presuming that composing fiction is not dissimilar from constructing a discourse of theory.

In this manner, the frequent conversations between the fictional Amis and John Self about the film script, in effect, were concerned with the postmodern narratives of *Money*: “We have a hero problem. We have a motivation problem. We have a fight problem. We have a realism problem.”³⁵ As indicated by Diedrick, it is Amis’s novel that unfolds these problems: “his protagonists are antiheroes [with] their motivation seldom fully explained; they are often involved in grotesque violence,”³⁶ and they settled in a fictitious world where even the rock-bottom realism has been questioned in an unconventionally realistic logic. Like Martina Twain, Amis the character also lectures Self on the relationship between the author and the narrator.

‘The distance between author and narrator corresponds to the degree to which the author finds the narrator wicked, deluded, pitiful or ridiculous. I’m sorry, am I boring you?’

‘– Uh?’

‘This distance is partly determined by convention. In the epic or heroic frame, the author gives the protagonist everything he has, and more. The hero is a god or has godlike powers or virtues. In the tragic... Are you all right?’

‘Uh?’ I repeated. I had just stabbed a pretzel into my dodgy upper tooth. Rescreening this little mishap in my head, I suppose I must have winced pretty graphically and then given a sluggish, tramplike twitch. Now I checked the tooth with my tongue. Martin talked contentedly on. Mouth-doctors are just like cowboy decorators or jobbing plumbers. When you’re young you think the world of adult services is reliable, proficient and cost-effective. Then you grow up to a life of fatboys and four-eyes, bullies and bookworms, fudgers and smudgers. I sipped my drink and sluiced the scotch round my upper west side.

‘The further down the scale he is, the more liberties you can take with him. You can do what the hell you like to him, really. This creates an appetite for punishment. The author is not free of sadistic impulses. I suppose it’s the –’

‘Hey look you got to give me a deadline. You don’t have to stick to it that closely but I got to have something to tell Fielding and Lorne. And Caduta. Davis, too. What about the fight?’³⁷

Guided by Amis’s instruction about the author-narrator distance, it is plausible to suggest that the more corrupt and despicable Self becomes, the less dominant and sensible he would be in the fictional plot of a money conspiracy and the context of cultural complicity. As the authorial presence becomes more intrusive and sadistic to constrain his authority and freedom, the text thus moves closer toward “an exploitation of the self-referent and the self-reflexive”³⁸ in the textual strategies of metafiction.

As an anti-heroic subject, John Self is nonetheless never obedient to this sadistically authorial desire and even frequently interrupts Amis’s ongoing speech regarding the relationship between the author and the narrator, posing a threat to his narrative autonomy and instinctive responses. Fur-

thermore, Self's dialogic form of narration presupposes the latent existence of the external audience to whom he tried to resort for "external validation and ethical appeasement"³⁹ through direct interaction. His retainment of an independent voice and relative autonomy relies heavily on readers' solicitude and sympathy, for they are "natural believers [and] have something of the authorial power to create life."⁴⁰ At this point, this self-conscious or metafictional faith in the assistance of the audience beyond the fictional world of the character and the author undermines the hierarchical narration between Self and Amis the character. It achieves the transfer of narrative dominance from text to the reader, free from any established literary conventions.

Conspicuously, the last chapter of *Money*, an italicized episode written in a diaristic style, manifests Self's final attempt to "escape from his author's surveillance and control."⁴¹ But unfortunately, he gains nothing, except for criminal lawsuits, debts, cheap cigarettes, alcohol, and mental breakdown. Through a metafictional approach, he tried to ask for financial assistance from the external reader via his internal monologue:

*Credit? I haven't got any and maybe I never will again. Yes, I'm busted. Do you know of any cheap flats? Can you lend me some money – just until Thursday? I'll pay you back. Honest. Martin was right. I'm the last to know as usual, but my lawyers have finally established who was tabbing the whole psychodrama, from cab fares to lab fees, from soup to nuts. Me. Muggins here. Fuck! Why didn't I look at all the stuff he made me sign? Oh, I was a pup, let's face it.*⁴²

And also, for the psychological consolation:

*I opened my eyes today and thought, whew, I've never felt as old as this before. And yet that's accurate, isn't it. I've never been as old as this before. And so it will go for every morning of our lives. You too, brother. And you, sister. How are things. Are you all okay?... Pretty soon now I'm going to look in the mirror and find that my nose has exploded on me. The grog lichen will steal across my face like verdigris. Then the inner works will start their failing. My fat pal Fat Paul once said that money, it isn't worth anything if you haven't got your health. Yeah, but what happens if you haven't got your health or any money either? When you haven't got your health, that's when you really need a couple of bob. I can't complain, though.*⁴³

Conditioned by a postmodern popular market and economic system, Self's esthetic and moral standards doom him to conflict with the highbrow culture, which satirically mirrors his self-destruction. His realization of the audience's existence recurrently disputes the moral and cultural ascendancy of the author, as well as the author-surrogate. Their narrative authority is then dissolved and subverted by a new alliance between the fictional character and the actual audience. Hence, the unassailable hegemony of the author-centered narrative structure in a classical or realistic novel, tends to be deconstructed by the frame-breaking or metaleptic violation of the boundary between fiction and reality. The writer, the character and the reader begin to interact with each other in a free, unrestricted exchange instead of operating in a rigid, conventional hierarchy. In short, these metafictional strategies of narration indeed create a sense of textual hyperreality – in a postmodernist mode of disrupting and rethinking the esthetic value, meaning, and interpretation through a dynamic process between the text and society.

Toward Baudrillard's Literary Hyperreality

This section further explores how *Money: A Suicide Note* as a metafictional novel establishes the literary hyperreality to challenge the customary reception and interpretation. Conceptualized by Jean Baudrillard, the term hyperreality is the result of the precession and prevalence of his basic idea of simulacrum, or simulacra, whose processing is no longer "a referential being or a substance [but rather] the generation by models of a real without origin or reality."⁴⁴ This simulacrum means a copy or an image with no reference to the real or the original, that yet is relying on its self-referentiality. For what is represented, equals the representation.⁴⁵ In this way, Baudrillard's hyperreality denotes a symbolic exchange of both the real and the imaginary. The image or the signifier precedes its meaning, the

signified, and gradually becomes dominant in the reverse order of Saussurean structuralism, so that the notions of reality, history, truth, and meaning become eroded. Therefore, in his postmodern world of simulacra, the hyperreal becomes a self-conscious, self-reflexive system of a simulation that simulates itself, similar to the mode of metafiction. As Susan Brook argues “Amis destabilizes the distinction between reality and fiction, he [thereby] is Baudrillard incarnated as a novelist:”⁴⁶ the writer or the practitioner of the Baudrillardian theory of simulacra in *Money* constructs a sort of textual hyperreality. Within it, the boundary between fiction and reality tends to be undermined with the complete collapse of narrative layers in a literary genre of self-referential *mise-en-abîme*.

To mask the absence of, and detachment from absolute reality, Baudrillard introduces four successive phases of the image into a simulacrum from a reflection to a distorted representation.⁴⁷ According to his idea, literary/textual hyperreality indicates the appearance of the intrusive author (the fictional Amis) and conceals the absence of the real author or the authorial intention (as/of Martin Amis) in a traditional novel. Understanding and interpreting the novel thus becomes problematic; what is real in the realm of the author has been substituted and governed by the author-surrogate, who can be seen as a fictitious representation, or as a simulacrum of the real author. The readers are put in an uncertain position where it is difficult for them to determine the reliability of the fictionalized authorial intention. Although reflecting the fundamental existence of reality, the fictional Amis can still mask and pervert the real to be itself an unfaithful copy. In this sense, the literary hyperreality is the incompetence of consciousness to distinguish the natural world from a simulation or fictional construction of reality. Especially in metafiction, it blends the fictional and the real and makes the fiction even more real (“hyperreal”) than reality, with more critically realistic topics that require us to ponder on.

Furthermore, the fictionalization of the author-figure in the novel disempowers the control of the real author’s existence. Its textual function could even be compared to the poststructuralist, Nietzschean “death of God,” or, more precisely, what Roland Barthes terms the author’s death:

It is not that the Author cannot “return” in the Text, in his text, but he does so, one might say, as a guest; if he is a novelist, he inscribes himself there as one of his characters, drawn as a figure in the carper; his inscription is no longer privileged, paternal, alethic, but ludic: he becomes, one can say, a paper author; his life is no longer the origin of his fable, but a fable concurrent with his life.⁴⁸

Barthes’ meaning of the authorial intrusion demonstrates the metaleptic violation and decentralization of the author and the author-oriented reception behind it. In this way, the novel can be read and deciphered with multiple interpretations, instead of an absolute single one. As Barthes argues, the text is fundamentally a passage or an overcrossing of plural meanings, rather than the patriarchal conformity of the work to the author. In this metafiction, John Self has shown the decentralization and refusal of authorial intention many times. For example, his disagreement and interference at their meeting about the film project, and his escape from the suicidal action out of the author-surrogate’s complicity. In the final section of the novel, it is interesting to note how astounded and affronted Martin Amis the character was when seeing Self, since his fictional protagonist was supposed to be “out of the picture.”⁴⁹

Apart from the author-figure’s reliability and realness, *Money*’s establishment of literary hyperreality is evident when the novel asks its characters to speak with the reader directly. As shown in its prologue, this *Suicide Note*, as it is subtitled, is designed for “you out there, the dear, the gentle.”⁵⁰ Self’s search for his narrative autonomy and independent voice is foregrounded in his “acute[ly] aware[ness] of the existence and potential criticism of an external audience,”⁵¹ who “will believe in the characters and feel concern for them [...] no matter how much you do to forestall it,”⁵² as Amis the author once said in an interview. It is the metafictional narrative that provides the possibility of a hyperreal space for the protagonist’s self-conscious dialog with the reader, who is outside the text. The real and the fictional are seamlessly blended so that there is no clear distinction among the

different layers of the author, the character, and the reader. The literary hyperreality is here grounded on the frame-break, or on the alternation of the frame as essential deconstructive methods of metafiction.⁵³ It attempts to make the reader unable to distinguish the real world from a simulation or fictitious representation of the social and cultural realities.

Conclusion

To conclude, this study critically investigated the complicated and well-conceived narrative structure of Amis's *Money*. It explored how these metafictional strategies formulate the literary hyperreality to deconstruct the literary and philosophical conventions of truth, meaning, and comprehension in the sociocultural pluralism of the late twentieth century. As a self-conscious, self-reflexive novel, the author in *Money* uses the authorial intrusion, doubling, metafictional commentary, and character-reader interaction to undermine the borderline between fiction and reality, as well as the traditional narrative frames among the author, the character, and the reader. In this manner, Amis's *Money* reflects and operates textual hyperreality through an alternative frame or violent metalepsis to experiment with a distinctive representation of thematic complexity and structural innovation.

Amis uses the most common metafictional techniques to estrange and defamiliarize habitual forms of creation and literary conventions of interpretation. These textual strategies are used to undermine the authority "of the omniscient author, of the closure of the 'final' ending, of the definitive interpretation."⁵⁴ As Hutcheon argues in her "Historiographic Metafiction," postmodern knowledge has only witnessed a series of "unresolved contradiction[s]" in the form of plural truths or meanings, instead of the singular or absolute Truth.⁵⁵ Both thematically and formalistically, *Money* as a metafiction should be read as a forceful mode that plays with the received notions of meaning in a complex, interactive relationship between the overlapping layers of fictionality and reality. Hence, as exemplified by *Money*, contemporary metafiction helps readers discard conventional expectancies of meaning, narrative voice, and closure recurrently appearing in a realistic novel. Instead of the old-fashioned storytelling of narrative linearity, metafictional construction opens up a new space for the internalized linguistic and textual interaction, the "spatial form" of the novel, and multivocal co-existence across the real and fictional border. More significantly, it encourages the reader to construct new values, meanings, and interpretations of the everyday world and the status of themselves as a human subject in these postmodern conditions.

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Notes

¹ This study cites from its later edition: Martin Amis, *Money: A Suicide Note* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005).

² Amis, 91.

³ Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 201.

⁴ Nicky Marsh, "Money's Doubles: Reading, Fiction, and Finance Capital," *Textual Practice* 26, no. 1 (February 2012), 119.

⁵ Both Amis's novel *Money* and Baudrillard's "The Precession of Simulacra" excerpts from his *Symbolic Exchange and Death* will be the primary texts for the discussion herein, and secondary critical materials will mainly cover the theory of metafiction, and specific research on Amis's authorial intrusion, intertextuality, and other elements concerning his characteristics of self-consciousness and self-reflexivity.

- ⁶ Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Methuen Publishing, 1990), 2. Waugh's *Metafiction*, a key work on metafiction theory, offers a good starting point for our understanding on the definition, attribute, development, and theoretical rationale of this postmodernist literary device.
- ⁷ Mark Currie, introduction to *Metafiction*, ed. Currie (London: Longman, 1995), 2.
- ⁸ Brian McHale, "Chinese-Box Worlds," in *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2004), 120.
- ⁹ Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (London: Methuen Publishing, 1980), 154.
- ¹⁰ Waugh, 6.
- ¹¹ Marsh, 117.
- ¹² Jon Begley, "Satirizing the Carnival of Postmodern Capitalism: The Transatlantic and Dialogic Structure of Martin Amis's *Money*," *Comparative Literature* 45, no. 1 (Spring 2004), 81.
- ¹³ Amis, 35; 67.
- ¹⁴ C. James Mickalites, "Martin Amis's *Money*: Negotiations with Literary Celebrity," *Postmodern Culture* 24, no. 1 (September 2013) <https://www.pomoculture.org/2016/09/25/martin-amis-money-negotiations-with-literary-celebrity/>.
- ¹⁵ Amis, 236.
- ¹⁶ Amis, 126.
- ¹⁷ Amis, 91.
- ¹⁸ James Diedrick, "Notes from the Urban Underground: *Money*," in *Understanding Martin Amis* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 75. Furthermore, the third chapter of Diedrick's *Understanding Martin Amis* explicitly analyses the narrative techniques of *Money*, such as plot design, narrator's voice, and the use of doubling, which helpfully sheds light on my analytic interpretation of the metafictional structure in the novel.
- ¹⁹ Diedrick, 94.
- ²⁰ Amis, 88.
- ²¹ Diedrick, 94.
- ²² Richard Todd, "The Intrusive Author in British Postmodernist Fiction: The Cases of Alasdair Gray and Martin Amis," in *Exploring Postmodernism*, ed. Matei Calinescu and Douwe Fokkema (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co., 1990), 133.
- ²³ Diedrick, 92.
- ²⁴ Begley, 97.
- ²⁵ Amis, 204.
- ²⁶ Amis, 334.
- ²⁷ Amis, 128.
- ²⁸ Amis, 98.
- ²⁹ Amis, 44.
- ³⁰ Amis, 136.
- ³¹ Begley, 97.
- ³² Amis, 132.
- ³³ Mark Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 51.
- ³⁴ Waugh, 21.
- ³⁵ Amis, 221.
- ³⁶ Diedrick, 95.
- ³⁷ Amis, 246–47.
- ³⁸ Todd, 124.
- ³⁹ Begley, 102.
- ⁴⁰ Amis, 260.
- ⁴¹ Diedrick, 97.
- ⁴² Amis, 383.
- ⁴³ Amis, 390.
- ⁴⁴ Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra," in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch et al. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010), 1557.
- ⁴⁵ Gary Aylesworth, "Postmodernism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, eds. Edward N. Zalta et al. (2015), <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/postmodernism/>.

- ⁴⁶ Susan Brook, "The Female Form, Sublimation, and Nicola Six," in *Martin Amis: Postmodernism and Beyond*, ed. Gavin Keulks (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 94.
- ⁴⁷ Baudrillard, 1560.
- ⁴⁸ Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 161.
- ⁴⁹ Amis, 389.
- ⁵⁰ Amis, 389.
- ⁵¹ Begley, 101.
- ⁵² Diedrick, 97.
- ⁵³ Waugh, 31.
- ⁵⁴ Waugh, 13.
- ⁵⁵ Linda Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction: 'The Pastime of Past Time'," in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2004), 106.

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The Dialectics of Realist Imagination: Adorno's Aesthetics and Contemporary Japanese Fiction

KINYA NISHI

1. An Aesthetic of Suffering?

The final chapter of Theodor Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, entitled "Meditations on Metaphysics," is well known for its sobering meditation on the impact of the Holocaust upon philosophical thinking. Like other intellectuals associated with the Frankfurt School, Adorno considered human capacity for abstract reasoning as being totally mediated by historical process, and philosophical speculation about "the transcendent" was no exception. The atrocity of the Holocaust "paralyzed" metaphysical faculty, shattering "the basis on which speculative metaphysical thought could be reconciled with experience,"¹ he asserts.

It is in this context that Adorno apparently revokes his famous statement about the impossibility of poetry writing after Auschwitz.² The dictum may indeed be valid, he suggests, as long as one has the right to express one's pain "as a tortured man has to scream," but the question to ask is not "whether one can write poems after Auschwitz," but "whether one can *live* after Auschwitz." To illustrate how horrifyingly the Holocaust survivors experience their inner lives, he then touches on his recurring dream in which he was not in fact living, but just manifesting a wish of a survivor from Auschwitz.

However, in his lecture course on metaphysics (1965), which preceded the publication of *Negative Dialectics* by a year, Adorno expresses certain reservations about the same statement from a very different angle. There, with an air of nonchalance, he reminds the audience that it is in the nature of philosophy that "nothing is meant quite literally." It is simply a misunderstanding of philosophy to take his remark at face value and accuse poets of doing wrong. And then he comes to his point:

I would readily concede that, just as I said that after Auschwitz one *could not* write poems – by which I meant to point to the hollowness of resurrected culture – it could equally well be said, on the other hand, that one *must* write poems, in keeping with Hegel's statement in his *Aesthetics* that as long as there is an awareness of suffering among human beings there must also be an art as the objective figure [*die objektive Gestalt*] of this awareness. And, heaven knows, I do not claim to resolve this antinomy, and presume even less to do so since my own impulses in this antinomy are precisely on the side of art, which I was mistakenly accused of wishing to suppress.³

This endorsement of literary creation after Auschwitz may come as a surprise, if not a disappointment—curiously, we have a desire to hear Adorno denouncing any attempt at composing a graceful piece of poem in such a dark age. Yet as it is clearly expounded here, what is vital for Adorno is not discrediting all the creative practice in the wake of Auschwitz, but calling attention to the "antinomy" that is inherent in our moral response to horrifying events. It is certainly true that the sheer magnitude and cruelty of the Holocaust suggests the impossibility of depicting the agony of those who experienced it. Even so, as Adorno insists here, the horror of the Holocaust should not deter us from searching for its meaning. In fact, it is imperative to carry on the endeavor in order to give an "objective figure" to the affliction of victims. Thus, Adorno goes on to write in a movingly uncompromising note, that "as long as I can express what I am

trying to express, and as long as I believe I am finding words for what otherwise would have none... I will not wield to that hope, that wish."⁴ "That wish" in the final sentence meaning a morbid desire to kill oneself, this passage testifies to Adorno's commitment to survive against despair in order to continue philosophical exploration.

If we keep this commitment in mind, we will appreciate that a common perception of Adorno as a pessimistic intellectual, who has given up hope for the future of meaningful cultural production, is profoundly misleading. Moreover, the fact that such a perception is so widespread implies that certain "positive" aspects of Adorno's careful balancing act have been undervalued. In fact, the struggle to achieve genuine expressions for the predicament in one of the most tumultuous centuries in history would require a defiantly positive quality of thinking that can match the negative. And if one gives full attention to the uncompromisingly positive aspect of Adorno's thought, it will help, as we shall see, to reveal his aesthetic in a wider comparative scope.

Apparently, though, Adorno is indeed hostile to an affirmative outlook in general. It is perhaps for his strong aversion to the affirmation of the status quo that in the process of editing the manuscript of *Negative Dialectics* (which is obviously based on the metaphysics lecture), the encouragement to make poems after Auschwitz was erased, and in its place a somewhat sardonic phrase—"perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream"—is inserted. But why such an emphasis on human pain and agony? For one thing, suffering is something that encapsulates the sensitivity of individual existence, as opposed to the general working of human reason. Indeed, Adorno evokes the suffering of the individual subject whenever he attacks human rationality for its totalizing function. In an extended chapter on Hegel in *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno comments on Hegel's theory of history in the following terms:

If [Hegel] transfigured the totality of historic suffering into the positivity of the self-realizing absolute, the One and All that keeps rolling on to this day – with occasional breathing spells – would teleologically be the absolute of suffering.⁵

From this perspective, human agony is seen as an icon of "non-identity," something that refuses the workings of mental abstraction. It should also be noted that such an accentuation of pain reflects his refutation of the positive idea of historical progress which fails to recognize the grimness of contemporary society. In the sphere of the aesthetic, rationality is in that case opposed to the expression of human affliction as a mirror of awful reality. Adorno remarks in *Aesthetic Theory* that "suffering remains foreign to knowledge; [...] Suffering conceptualized remains mute and inconsequential,"⁶ whereby his focus is on the "darkening world" that makes the irrationality of art rational.

It is perhaps this apparent dualism of rationality and artistic experience that misleads us to conceive aesthetic experience in his theory as the only alternative for the instrumental reason. In fact, various readings of *Aesthetic Theory* along a sort of anti-universalist line have elaborated rather romantic interpretations of artworks as a means to disrupt any belief in progress and universalism, or any position seemingly based on "identity thinking." Commentators highlight "the other" of human reason—notions such as "the somatic" or "the subconscious," for instance—assuming that they could actually defeat the system of "identity thinking" simply by identifying something beyond the system. Unlike Adorno's reflection, however, such anti-universalist theories barely acknowledge the fact that identity should always be held in tension with non-identity.

In fact, Adorno's dialectical reflection constantly alerts us to two contradictory demands. On the one hand, we must forbid ourselves from looking beyond the system of thought; but at the same time, we must keep trying to see what actually lies beyond the system. As some attentive scholars and critics have pointed out, Adorno's insight can generally be characterized by a constant vigilance toward the tension between the practice of human reflection and the individual thinking subject. In his majestic study of Adorno, for example, Fredric Jameson carefully

observes that even in denouncing a philosophical system, or arguing against the idea of the system itself, Adorno “retains the concept of the system and even makes it, as target and object of critique, the very center of his own anti-systematic thinking.”⁷ Adorno repeatedly brings this tension into focus in terms of “antinomy” or “contradiction,” and sometimes elucidates it by employing other metaphors. In the above-mentioned lecture, for instance, he remarks that “philosophical reflection really consists precisely in the gap [*Zwischenraum*], or, in Kantian terms, in the vibration between these two otherwise so flatly opposed possibilities.”⁸

With Adorno’s vigilance to antinomy kept in sight, then, it would not be hard to see that an anti-universalist claim is doubly wrong. On the one hand, such a claim is far too positive, as it is incapable of acknowledging that no perception (not even aesthetic experience) could offer a tangible meaning that is not tainted by injustice at the current historical stage. If one believes that an artwork could open up a realm where the truth was revealed through a singular existence of an individual (in the hardship of living as a sexual or racial minority, for instance), such a belief would be an illusion, simply because humanity has yet to materialize the conditions for reconciling individual sensitivity with the actual state of reality.

The ideological, affirmative aspect of the concept of the successful artwork has its corrective in the fact that there are no successful works of art. If they did exist, reconciliation would be really possible in the midst of the unreconciled, to which realm art belongs.⁹

Here is the “negative” moment of Adorno’s dialectical reflection which constantly warns us of the entanglement of each consciousness with the falsehood of human society at a certain historical stage. Yet, there is another, “positive” moment of dialectics which compels us to retain hope against despair, and to expect a fulfilling experience to come in the fullness of time. Anti-universalist theories of art are far too negative from this perspective because, as it were, it offers the promise of reconciliation on the cheap, trivializing the genuine possibility of reconciliation between art and reality.

Adorno seems to be fundamentally ambivalent on the idea of successful art. If one loses sight of the “gap” and “vibration,” pretending to have resolved the antinomies inherent to aesthetic experience, one will either play a part in the “hollowness of the resurrected culture,” or give up the struggle to bring the pain of the oppressed into words. But how can one develop a strategy for interpreting artworks under the condition of this fundamental dilemma? In the next section, I will explore this point from a slightly different angle, by examining Adorno’s critical stance towards “nominalism.”

2. Adorno’s Eschatological Realism

In the standard account of the history of philosophy, “nominalism” is coupled with its opponent “realism,” and put together they refer to a major debate in medieval scholastic philosophy. Nominalists such as Duns Scotus (ca. 1266–1308) and William of Ockham (1285–1347) refused the realist arguments that universal categories are real because, in their view, universals are only mental abstractions from uniquely individual things, while the concepts which we project upon the world are particular. Recently, critics and scholars have pointed out that nominalism signaled the emergence of a new form of thinking which has come down to modern philosophy. According to Charles Taylor’s historical survey, nominalist stress on the particularity came to light in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, when Franciscan thinkers gave a new status to the individual. One may recognize this process, Taylor writes, as “a major turning point in the history of Western civilization, an important step towards that primacy of the individual which defines our culture.”¹⁰ Drawing on this analysis, Terry Eagleton situates this origin of nominalism at the starting point of “a long road leading to liberalism, Romanticism, Theodor Adorno’s doctrine of the non-identity of an object with its concept, the postmodern suspicion of universals as snares to trap the politically unwary and a good deal more.”¹¹ It should

be noted here that Eagleton carefully avoids compartmentalizing Adorno's philosophy into the nominalist camp. Indeed, if we look closely at how Adorno deals with nominalism, it will be evident that Adorno is well aware of the downfall of nominalism in the modern world.

Adorno employs the term "nominalism" quite often. In the lecture on metaphysics, the term is given a scholarly definition as a notion "which holds that universal concepts exist *post rem* and not *ante rem*."¹² On other occasions, though, Adorno uses the word more broadly, in the sense that it is akin to what Taylor called the "primacy of the individual." There is a passage in *Negative Dialectics* where Adorno problematizes "the widespread popularity of philosophical nominalism" in modern thought, which he sees as an ideological tendency whereby "each individual existence is to take precedence over its concept."¹³ From this angle, nominalism is an illusion, as it is confined to the particular perspective, and therefore is incapable of seeing how each human subject is mediated by the whole society. And again, Adorno is scrupulously mindful of the antinomy involved in critical analyses. Indeed, he asserts that although nominalism is inevitably flawed, "socially, it is a necessary semblance,"¹⁴ as this semblance is indispensable for creating the image of reality as a whole.

Adorno is also conscious that modern aesthetics, with its inclination for originality and uniqueness rather than the stasis of classical form, is devoted to nominalism. In *Aesthetic Theory*, he notes that "by demolishing the security of forms, nominalism made all art *plein air* long before this became an unmetaphoric slogan. Thinking and art both became dynamic."¹⁵ Crucially, though, the dynamics of nominalism in modern art had its own "static element," and was destined to come to a standstill in itself.

What was organized by nominalistic art by means of development is stigmatized as superfluous once the intention of its function is recognized, and becomes an irritant... Just as for the bourgeois nominalistic artwork the necessity of a static form decayed, here it is the aesthetic dynamic that decays in accord with the experience first formulated by Kürnberger but flashing up in each line and stanza in Baudelaire, that life no longer exists. This has not changed in the situation in which contemporary art finds itself.¹⁶

Aesthetic nominalism reached its "limit" when the conventional idea of aesthetic experience as the link between the universal and the particular lost credibility. Such a change of perspective is inscribed in the poems of Baudelaire, an epoch-making creation for Adorno which, for the first time in the modern history of art, discredited the imagined link between specific aesthetic experience and the universal truth.

This is the way in which Adorno's dialectical-historical investigation manages to detect the "crisis of nominalism" which recent debates on the history of nominalism do not acknowledge. In fact, Adorno's scope involves an "anti-nominalist" moment apparently inspired by Karl Marx's analysis of capitalism as a social mechanism.¹⁷ And here, once more, Adorno is especially mindful of those ideologies that make us blind to the contradiction between the particular and the universal. An exemplary case of Adorno's watchfulness of this contradiction is found in the following passage, which spells out the dialectical relation between nominalism and utopia: "what nominalism clings to as its most assured possession is utopia; hence its hatred of utopian thinking, the thinking that conceives the difference from what exists."¹⁸ If we are so much confined to empirical perception to the extent that our representation of the reality becomes "utopian" (in the sense of "unrealistic"), then we are at the same time abandoning the genuinely utopian thinking, in that we discard the entire possibility of thinking otherwise.

However, in the context of our investigation, the anti-nominalist moment is particularly relevant as it allows us to detect a significant aspect in Adorno's thought that is "realist" rather than "nominalist." Such a "realist" dimension seems to derive not only from Marxism, but also from a messianic vision, which is often regarded to be at the core of Adorno's reflection. Famously, he starts the final essay of *Minima Moralia* entitled "Finale" with this passage:

The only philosophy which can be responsibly practiced in [sic.] face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique. Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light.¹⁹

It is easy to see that notions such as “redemption” and “messianic light” reflect a Judeo-Christian framework of temporality, consisting of anticipation and fulfillment. As commentators have rightly pointed out, however, Adorno’s belief in redemption is far from an affirmative hope. As Ross Wilson puts it, even though Adorno’s hope rests on a “bequest to the future,” “the realization of whose promise is hardly guaranteed.”²⁰ But if so, we could perhaps rediscover this kind of eschatological view as a strategy to keep antinomy open, and to continue the philosophical endeavor against despair. In fact, only by believing that a resolution will not appear until the end of time can one retain the antinomy without resolving it.

As scholars consent, the redemption is most palpable for Adorno in the experience of artistic beauty, although Adorno cautiously avoids presenting the individual works of art positively articulating the redemption. In *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno explains the ambiguity of “revelation” in aesthetic experience in following terms:

The theological heritage of art is the secularization of revelation, which defines the ideal and limit of every work. The contamination of art with revelation would amount to the unreflective repetition of its fetish character on the level of theory. The eradication of every trace of revelation from art would, however, degrade it to the undifferentiated repetition of the status quo.²¹

Remarkably, though, such an ambiguous status of theology may seem slightly obscured when Adorno performs the analysis of specific artworks. Let us take, for example, his commentary on Marcel Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*. According to Adorno’s account, Proust’s obsession with the concrete brings forth a materialization of “a truly theological idea.” “It is [Proust],” Adorno considers, “who, in a nonreligious world, took the phrase of immortality literally and tried to salvage life, as an image, from the throes of death. But he did so by giving himself up to the most futile, the most insignificant, the most fugitive traces of memory.”²² It is worth noting that Adorno’s explanation comes uncomfortably close to those interpretations of art which regard successful works of art as positive alternatives to instrumental rationality. In his assumption that significant details of the literary text represent the important whole, Adorno borders on a regular form of literary realism. Yet, as a rare kind of realist who has a radically eschatological vision, Adorno is fully aware of the discrepancy between artistic renditions and reality, a discrepancy which is indisputable in the post-nominalist era.²³

It is crucial in this context to point out that in Adorno’s view, the crisis of nominalism overlaps the decline of tragic art. Essentially, Adorno regards the tradition of the tragic form, like nominalism and metaphysical contemplation, as a thing of the past.²⁴ On exploring the modern history of art, he speaks of “the liquidation of tragedy” in Baudelaire’s works, whereby the aesthetic category of the noble became “spurious.” Adorno describes a historical process in which nobility in art came to collide with social privilege and political conservatism.²⁵ In his consideration of the situation in the twentieth century, then, Adorno suggests that the tragic sense haunts contemporary art as a whole:

[the category of tragedy] seems to be the aesthetic imprint of evil and death and as enduring as they are. Nevertheless it is no longer possible. All that by which aesthetic pedants once zealously distinguished the tragic from the mournful – the affirmation of death, the idea that the infinite glimmers through the demise of the finite, the meaning of suffering – all this now returns to pass judgement on tragedy. Wholly negative artworks now parody the tragic. Rather than being tragic, all art is mournful, especially those works that appear cheerful and harmonious.²⁶

The cynical tone of the final passage reminds us of his morbid comment on making poems after Auschwitz. But is tragedy really a dead, barren form of art, only capable of being a metaphor of the misery of contemporary society? Can one take a completely different perspective and consider the tragic form to be involving a historical dynamic as such?

In fact, as I have argued elsewhere, tragic art can be seen as a representation of the historical tension between old and new human values.²⁷ A tragic hero(ine) has to perish when they are trapped between older moral convention and newly introduced universal value, and inevitably choose the latter. Indeed, scholars like Jean-Pierre Vernant and Raymond Williams consider the period of “historical transition” to be a particularly advantageous condition for tragic creation.²⁸ The condition for tragic art, Williams argues, is “the real tension between old and new: between received beliefs, embodied in institutions and responses, and newly and vividly experienced contradictions and possibilities.”²⁹ Each work of tragic art can therefore be seen as an embodiment of the friction between the well-established beliefs of a culture and the moral convictions that the tragic hero holds. From this perspective, tragedy can be conceived as a collision between a particular cultural tradition and universal human ideals. Certainly, as Williams admits, artists have faced difficulty in creating tragic art in modern times as tragic resolutions became more and more difficult, and “tragic deadlock” turned into “tragic stalemate.” But there have been successful dramatizations of contradiction in modern society, a tradition consisting of Ibsen, Strindberg, Pirandello, Beckett, and Brecht.

From this perspective, tragedy is the formation of the disjunction of the infinite and the finite, rather than their correspondence. It is even arguable that tragedy is the artform which strives to materialize “the objective figure of antinomy” which Adorno is talking of in his lecture on metaphysics. I suspect, however, that Adorno did not acknowledge this dialectical tension within tragic form.³⁰

But perhaps Adorno’s reflection exerts its potency more explicitly in the interpretation of specific works of art, rather than in general formulation. I will now adapt Adorno’s insight to the comparative study of literary works.

3. Tragedy and Hope in Contemporary Japan

In this final section, we discuss specific pieces of writing, namely stories by Kenzaburō Ōe, and a novel by Haruki Murakami, both written in Tokyo in the mid 1980s. This was a time when Japan emerged as a prosperous and confident nation, yet beneath the increasing economic success on the surface was the decline of democracy.³¹ The historical contradiction manifested itself as a mass democratic movement that came to the fore in the 1960s and that was very active until it collapsed at the end of the decade. By 1972, the Left in Japan had lost hold of many of its political causes, such as the opposition to the Security Treaty or the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Thereafter, according to John W. Dower’s depiction, “the average citizen turned inward, to bask in Japan’s new international influence as an economic power and become consumed by material pursuits.”³²

Throughout this period, to take up the radical democratic activism as a literary theme was simply distasteful. What was especially unpleasant for the “new generation” of Japanese authors was the memory of the radical student movement, which lapsed into confused theoretical disputes and factional violence. It took more than a decade for the writers to be able to take this traumatic experience as a literary theme that could be neatly placed in a fiction. It would be interesting to compare the contrasting approaches in which Murakami, who belongs to the new age, and Ōe, an older type of realist, repeatedly handle their ambivalence to the distressing past.

Murakami’s *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (1985) consists of two alternating plots: the “hardboiled wonderland” chapters and “the end of the world” chapters. The narrator of the hardboiled chapters (not exactly a detective figure) tries to outwit the shady organization

in order to find out the secret of the microchip that was planted in his brain, with the help of a fat girl and a doctor. This part is set in contemporary Japan which is replete with Western consumerism epitomized by delicious sandwiches and comfy sofas, popular culture, such as the music of Bob Dylan and John Coltrane, and citations from Dostoevsky's or Marcel Proust's books. The other part, "the end of the world," is nostalgically set in a quiet village, separated from the external world by a "wall." The narrator, having no memory of their previous life, tries to reveal the history of the village and retrieve his memory. As the novel unfolds, the reader gradually figures out the connection between the two parts.

At first glance, the reader would barely notice the theme of the student movement mentioned in the novel. There is no doubt, however, that Murakami is acutely aware of the violent past. In the novel, and especially in its "hard-boiled" section, Murakami carefully selects memories of the radical movement, and slips them into the narrative, while making sure that the past historical events or their global repercussions have no impact upon the comfort of contemporary domestic life. To take some examples, "the year of the Japanese Red Army shoot-out in Karuizawa" marks nothing more than the year when the narrator slept with a fat female;³³ and when the protagonist goes to bed after a long day's work, he says he is determined to sleep even if "Israeli commandos might decimate a Palestinian village."³⁴ Such tiny descriptions suggest Murakami's desire to detach himself from the brutal past, rejecting any sympathy for the radical movement. The following is the narrator's recollection of the era in which he, as a young student, bought a GI jacket:

I bought that jacket in 1971, I was pretty sure. The Vietnam war was still going on, Nixon and his ugly mug were still in the White House. Everybody and his brother had long hair, wore dirty sandals and army-surplus jackets with peace signs on the back, tripped out to psychedelic music, thought they were Peter Fonda ... They are all as remote as the Jurassic.³⁵

If one considers the fact that the novel was written only less than two decades after the radical movement, the description may seem far-fetched. But it could be read, retrospectively, as a desperate attempt to blot out the painful memory.³⁶ Interestingly, Kenzaburō Ōe uses the metaphor of an archeological time span in his *Kaba ni Kamareru* [Bitten by a Hippopotamus], published in the same year as *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. It is remarkable how Ōe used a similar metaphor to imply a secret sympathy to the people involved in the radical movement, rather than as a way of distancing himself.

Kaba ni kamareru consists of eight loosely linked short stories. Four stories that are clearly connected evolve around the relation between a former fighter in the Red Army group and a lady, whose sister was murdered in factional violence. In each of the other four stories, the narrator comes to know the persons who had their own memories of the radical student movement. Together, the stories recollect and reinterpret the past, and try to imagine the new activism that could possibly bring about a social transformation. This is not merely indicated by the character's opinions about the disastrous failure in the past, but also through the narrative perspective on characters, their attitudes to life, and their action. Ōe's imaginative empathy with the cause of radical campaigns is not emphatic, but extremely subtle and nuanced. In fact, the radicalized students he portrays are by and large thoughtful and sincere, yet whether they are entirely trustworthy is always open to question.

One of the stories, "Yonmanneren mae no tachiaoi" [the hollyhock flowers from forty thousand years ago] is about a female character called Taka-chan, a bright and active, yet slightly idiosyncratic girl, distantly related to the narrator's family. After an unfortunate marriage, she was injured in the violence of the student movement at a university in Kyoto. Though the accident eventually ruins her life, she never accused the radical students, but told the narrator about her plan to build a support group for all women involved in the movement, accommodating both the victims and perpetrators.

Toward the end of the story, the narrator wrote a letter to his relatives, recounting an episode about the hollyhock flower. On hearing the name of the flower, Taka-chan, who was now locked up by her family for her mental illness, murmured an incomprehensible phrase “forty thousand years,” to the dismay of her family. But the narrator knew that her mind was clear. When Taka-chan was studying anthropology at a university, she asked the narrator to help her translate some academic articles written in French. One of the texts concerned a grave of a neanderthal, just excavated in an Iraqi cave. When discovered, the body was surrounded by hollyhock flowers, which indicated that people of four thousand years ago entombed her with the flowers.

Evidently, the mourning for the neanderthal woman overlaps with Taka-chan’s empathy with girls who suffered in the movement. The implication is clear: Even though Taka-chan’s mind is understood by hardly anyone, there might be someone, in tens of thousands of years’ time, who could acknowledge the justice of her action. Yet, the prospect is expressed in a day-dream as the narrator looks down a vast hill in China:

If only I could find a way out of this and discover a time and space where Taka-chan has regained her sanity and health; a time and space where the death of the girls murdered in disgrace and fear would find a vindication and beauty as humans. The murderers as well as the murdered will persist in meaningful lives, and the girls will have been even resurrected purely. From the viewpoint of this peaceful land, it would be I myself ... that cannot be set free from the burdensome suffering.³⁷

Here, Ōe manages to simultaneously pose and decline the possibility of resolving the contradiction between high-minded ideals and group politics. And in this sense, this story is a powerful case of modern tragic art. The narrator builds a relationship with a group of serious activists who put into practice radical visions for a better future, only to witness a miserable failure.³⁸ Taka-chan may be regarded as a tragic protagonist, though (and precisely because) her high-minded ideal has to be crushed.

Terry Eagleton maintains that “tragedy in the artistic sense known to the West would seem to have no precise equivalent in Eastern civilizations, and thus is not exactly universal in scope.”³⁹ In my view, however, the non-West is only *yet* to have the precise equivalent. From the viewpoint of eschatology, any culture is in a constant process of transformation, compelling the subject to struggle with conflicting human values, which in turn urges tragic creation.⁴⁰

Sure, Murakami’s work may seem tragic too, particularly in the narrator’s final decision to stay with the residents confined at “the end of the world.” But its poignancy comes from his resignation, which resolves the contradiction between moral and reality through the abandonment of justice in a wider context. In the Western tradition of tragic art, the determination of the tragic hero(ine) stands out sharply from his or her community, whereas in the Japanese premodern tradition, the protagonists remain bounded by collective ethics. At the end of Murakami’s novel, an overwhelming sense of fatalism and futility reigns. Murakami’s work, despite its “international” outlook, is far from universal. It is based on the longstanding local tradition of *naturalism*.

As a matter of fact, one could regard this tradition of Japanese naturalism as a form of nominalism, in the sense that it is supposed to evoke the direct link between particular expression and universal truth. Ever since Japan opened itself to Europe in the late nineteenth century, artists struggled to resolve the contradiction between newly introduced values and local traditions, by creating a nominalist illusion in aesthetic experience. Furthermore, the modern tradition of naturalism has been particularly successful in establishing the aesthetic subject as something entirely non-historical, and thus free of contradiction. As Adorno constantly reminds us, however, there is no such abstract form of the subject, because subjective consciousness is always mediated through historical time and specific place. If, as Frank Farrell argues, nominalism represents a disenchantment with the world,⁴¹ then the failure of mass political movements was the historical turning point where the illusion of nominalism replaced political activism. Indeed,

authors and critics associated with Japanese naturalism have regarded literary realism as their arch enemy. Murakami's style was welcomed as an innovative approach that would replace the age-old realist tradition.⁴² Nonetheless, it is more appropriate to consider this new trend to be a resurrection of an even older tradition.

Contrastingly, Ōe's realism has much to do with Adorno's visions, especially in its preference for a figure of disjuncture between the finite and the infinite. Ōe's novel rejects an abstract subject, but instead makes an attempt to attain a more substantive universality in its creation of tragic drama. Ōe's realistic setting and writing style, unlike those of Murakami's narrative device, prevents the reader from identifying with ahistorical subjectivity, as it constantly reminds them of the specificity of the difficult task of achieving social justice at the current stage of historical development.

If so, it is rather ironic that Ōe's fictions have often been attacked for being too "private." Certainly, Ōe's works appear to be revisiting the same place and time repeatedly. But this is not so: The fact is that the same past event repeatedly interrogates the present reader, continually testing the state of the subject at a certain historical stage. In this regard, the real theme of his fiction is not the past but the present, or more precisely the distance and interrelation between the past and the present. And such distance and interrelation can only be measured properly from the standpoint of redemption, from the end of time. Indeed, the narrator's daydream in the above-mentioned passage comes very close to Adorno's eschatological vision of redemption.

Raymond Williams argued in the late 1970s that the experience of the Russian Revolution still reverberates in many generations, and that "to try to evade that experience remains unforgivable."⁴³ In the context of postwar Japan, the student protests should be situated in the context of an "extraordinary history" of the twentieth century, as Williams puts it with regard to tragic creation in the twentieth century. One could claim that Ōe, too, confronts "the pain of struggle" of the people who tried to develop imaginative political visions to transform the future, in a nation where such vision was abandoned.

These themes are very much universal, in the sense that they are not randomly selected, but are crucial events in the history of modern Japan. The citizen's democratic movement in the 1960s is not simply a random episode in Ōe's fiction writing. Like Nadine Gordimer's apartheid, Gunter Grass' Nazi occupation, or even the reprisal of Firenze by Black Guelfs for Dante, its importance lies in the fact that it allegorizes the difficulties and hope of attaining human freedom, or, of fulfilling human freedom through solidarity.

According to Peter Dews, Adorno's philosophy evokes a higher form of practice which can be called "prefigurative praxis."⁴⁴ Such practice seeks "to body forth the transformed world that it struggles to bring nearer, and in doing so promotes the mutual support and moral transformation of its participants." Dews calls attention to the affinities between Adorno's idea and the religious conception of Kant and Hegel, which can be a surprise if one thinks of Adorno's critique of these great philosophers. For humans as historical beings, it is not only possible, but also necessary, to keep struggling to change the world for better and simultaneously to acknowledge that "we are what's wrong with the world." Both Adorno and Ōe tell us that the two moments must be kept antinomical; but that there is still a hope.

Notes

- ¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1994), 362.
- ² The exact wording of the statement in the essay “Cultural Criticism and Society” (1949) is as follows: “Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write a poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today.” Theodor W. Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society” in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1981), 34.
- ³ Theodor W. Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 110. The translation is slightly modified, based on the original German text: Theodor W. Adorno, *Metaphysik: Begriff und Probleme*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1998), 172–173.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 320.
- ⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, (London; New York: Continuum, 1997), 24. Jameson writes that one is tempted to characterize Adorno’s theory of art as an “aesthetic of scars.” Yet this is not Jameson’s final assessment of Adorno’s aesthetic theory. See Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno, or the Persistence of the Dialectics* (London; New York: Verso, 1990), 201.
- ⁷ Jameson, *Late Marxism*, 27.
- ⁸ Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*, 110.
- ⁹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 249.
- ¹⁰ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA; London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007), 94.
- ¹¹ Terry Eagleton, *The Event of Literature* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2012), 3.
- ¹² Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*, 26.
- ¹³ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 312.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 290.
- ¹⁶ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 292.
- ¹⁷ See Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 305–306.
- ¹⁸ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 313.
- ¹⁹ Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London; New York: Verso, 1974), 247.
- ²⁰ See Ross Wilson, “Beauty and Sublimity” in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology and Modern European Thought*, ed. Nicholas Adams, George Pattison, and Graham Ward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 432.
- ²¹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 139.
- ²² Theodor W. Adorno, “Theses upon Art and Religion Today” in *Notes to Literature, Volume Two*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1992), 298.
- ²³ As is evident, the disjunction between the universal and the particular in post-nominalist art has its parallel in the decay of metaphysics after Auschwitz where, as we have touched upon, “the basis on which speculative metaphysical thought could be reconciled with experience” was shattered.
- ²⁴ In this sense, Adorno’s verdict on tragic art resonates with George Steiner’s famous declaration that tragic art has, somewhere along the way, lost its power as a literary genre in his book *Death of Tragedy*. See George Steiner, *Death of Tragedy*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), *passim*.
- ²⁵ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 313–314.
- ²⁶ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 36.
- ²⁷ See Kinya Nishi, *Fate, Nature, and Literary Form: The Politics of the Tragic in Japanese Literature* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2020).
- ²⁸ Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (New York: Zone Books, 1990); and Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2006).
- ²⁹ Williams, *Modern Tragedy*, 78.
- ³⁰ Adorno comments on Kierkegaard: “For Kierkegaard, the tragic is the finite that comes into conflict with the infinite and, measured according to it, is judged by the measure of the infinite.” Theodor Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 18.

- ³¹ As the historian Andrew Gordon points out, the entire postwar history of Japan can be characterized by a contrast between economic success and political struggle. See Andrew Gordon, *A Modern history of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present*, Third International Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 260.
- ³² After the disbanding of the People's Organization for Peace in Vietnam in the mid 1970s, he goes on, "no comparable coalition – eclectic, populist, both humanitarian and radical, nonviolent, genuinely internationalistic and individualistic in outlook – ever took place." See John W. Dower, "Peace and Democracy in Two Systems: External Policy and Internal Conflict" in *Postwar Japan as History*, ed. Andrew Gordon (University of California Press, 1993), 28.
- ³³ Haruki Murakami, *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, trans. Alfred Birnbaum (London: Vintage, 2001), 73.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.* 126. The following sentence "I couldn't stop it," which is added in English translation, apparently diminishes Murakami's cynical tone.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.* 219. The final phrase "they are all as remote as the Jurassic" is omitted in Birnbaum's translation, which has the effect of moderating Murakami's desire to detach himself from the violent past.
- ³⁶ From another perspective, the fact that the democratic movement around 1970 became "outdated" so quickly may not be so surprising after all. Adorno remarks (commenting on *Hedda Gabler*), "Only what failed is outdated." See Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 93.
- ³⁷ Kenzaburō Ōe, *Kaba ni kamareru* (Tokyo: Bungeishunjū, 1989), 143. My translation.
- ³⁸ Ōe's novels since the 1990s were further developments toward this direction. The stories consistently show how such an attempt is destined to fail under current historical situation. For a reading of Ōe's novels written after 2000, see Chapter 3 and 8 of my study *Fate, Nature, and Literary Form*.
- ³⁹ Eagleton, *The Event of Literature*, 227.
- ⁴⁰ Ōe seems to have acquired a universal sense of the tragic through his intense reading of such literary traditions as Dante, Blake, Dostoevsky, and T. S. Eliot.
- ⁴¹ See Frank Farrell, *Subjectivity, Realism and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Referred to in Eagleton, *The Event of Literature*, 10.
- ⁴² Thus, when *Hardboiled wonderland* was awarded the prestigious Tanizaki prize, one of its judges, Saiichi Maruya, praised Murakami's ability "to construct a graceful and lyrical world as a form of novel in an almost flawless manner." "Many authors are aware," Maruya continues, "that our fictions need to break away from realism, though an attempt to avoid realism usually ended up with a shambles. But Mr. Murakami writes in a logical manner while having thrown away realism. A refreshingly unique atmosphere arises out of this." Saiichi Maruya, "Tanizaki Jun'ichirō shō senpyō dai21kai" (judge's comment for the 21th Tanizaki Jun'ichirō prize winner) in *Maruya Saiichi Zenshū* (Tokyo: Bungeishunjū, 2014), 12: 307.
- ⁴³ Raymond Williams, "Afterword to *Modern Tragedy*" in *Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, (London; New York: Verso, 1989), 103.
- ⁴⁴ Peter Dews, *The Idea of Evil* (Malden; Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 231.

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‘Paapi Bicchua’: Transactions of Desire in Nissim Ezekiel’s ‘Night of the Scorpion’

BASUDHARA ROY

Every verb is a response to the world and conjures an act that engages with it in some definite and concrete sense. That which elevates an ordinary piece of work to the level of art, as every conscientious reader/observer will agree, is more than an appeal to quality, an intuition of the work’s complex referentiality and its rhizomatic engagement with various epistemic structures of meaning. In distinguishing between the author and the writer in his essay ‘Authors and Writers’, Roland Barthes states that the author, unlike the writer, has the ability to clarify nothing in his particular linguistic use – “he knows that his language, intransitive by choice and by labour, inaugurates an ambiguity, even if it appears to be peremptory, that it offers itself, paradoxically, as a monumental silence to be deciphered” (190) Art can lay claim to longevity, even immortality, precisely because it is intransitive and embodies a sense of ambiguity that makes its effective and complete semantic consumption difficult. There is, in it an inherent tendency to inspire, generate and sustain alternative readings, each of which is as unique and as limited as the story of six blind men describing an elephant. To this effect then, every new reading of a work throws new light upon it, illuminating certain aspects, muting certain others and in allowing it to enter into dialogue with a new set of ideas, evidences and possibilities, liberates it from slavery to an ‘original’ meaning.

“It is just that I struggle with any story that has stayed the same way for far too long,” writes Indian Dalit-feminist poet, Meena Kandasamy in her Preface to *M/s Militancy*. (8) Though what she describes is a political urge to creatively reinterpret received narratives, I find myself troubled as a reader and critic by a similar restless dissatisfaction with conventional interpretations of a work. ‘What else?’ I find myself asking, intensely drawn to texts that refuse to, in Arnold’s words, “abide our question”¹ or which, as Keats puts it “tease us out of thought”.² Not surprisingly, therefore, I have been vaguely disturbed by the unchanging interpretation that has ruled Nissim Ezekiel’s well-known poem ‘Night of the Scorpion’, first published in his collection *The Exact Name* in 1965. One of the most anthologized of Ezekiel’s poems, it is widely included in the English syllabus at the school level in India with the result that most Indian students who have received their education via the English-medium of instruction are aware of (and have probably been tested and evaluated at some level on) what the poem means or is supposed to mean, even if they have resisted reading the actual text. Not only have classroom teachers unanimously read the poem as a witness to a woman’s suffering by the bite of a scorpion in India’s rural countryside and eulogized it as a glowing representation of rural wisdom and Indian motherhood, the best of critics have confirmed the reading, locating in the poem the poet’s realist eye for detail, his strong sense of irony and a quintessential ‘Indianness’ manifested through naivety and piety. Part of this overwhelming confidence in interpretation comes from the poet himself. At a poetry reading at the University of North London on 9th October, 1989, Ezekiel mentioned that the poem was based on an autobiographical event that occurred when he was about twelve years old and his mother, indeed, was stung by a scorpion. This authorial comment has been so greatly trusted that it has hegemonically dominated the poem’s context and has strictly arrested alternate readings of it.

Commenting on her adolescent impressions of the poem, Leela Gandhi writes (and her response, though long, is worth quoting in its entirety as a sample of students’ first response to the poem):

I first read Nissim Ezekiel – his, ‘Night of the Scorpion’ – at an indeterminate school-going age on a day given over to domestic science tests. The poem was squeezed into an undistinguishable English Elective anthology where it sat uneasily alongside random excerpts from James Thurber, Rudyard Kipling, R.K. Narayan, and Winston Churchill. Encountered in a bustling corner of the Presentation Convent home studies ‘laboratory’, Ezekiel did not exactly make an impression. Filtered through a morass of feminine instruction on the reheating of apple pie for exhausted executive husbands, or, on the highly efficient removal of wasp stings using a piece of plastic only, ‘Night of a Scorpion’ readily blurred in my mind into the baffling literature of home remedies. In subsequent years its influence translated into the wisdom that sacks of rice had to be handled with extreme caution in the monsoon months; that the pain from a scorpion sting is felt in the whole body causing acute spasms and occasional fever and, last but by no means least, that under no circumstances must the affected area be burnt following application of paraffin oil. (xiii)

Following Gandhi’s Preface in the book is John Thieme’s Introduction to it where he describes the poem as “a dramatization of an encounter between secular Indian rationalism and pre-modern Hindu faith”, affirming that “it can be read as a precisely realized verse account of a very specific personal experience” (xxvi). Between this interpretation and me is no love lost. As an interpretation, it, indeed, possesses the maximum degree of legitimacy. My discontent, however, has been with this being almost the only one meaning of the poem handed down from generation to generation of students of Indian English literature globally. Over the years, the poem has garnered some ecological attention and critics have discoursed upon issues of animal rights in it. But this has still left the poem’s central meaning undisturbed. Some years ago, I came across my first alternative reading of the poem in a research article by Santanu Ganguly who attempts to read the relationship between the scorpion and its victim as that between a client and a prostitute. Ganguly, however, rests his case on speculation and offers no convincing evidence within the poem to back his interpretation. In what ways does the poem invite him to regard the woman as a prostitute? Also, whether the scorpion in the poem is an instance of metaphor or metonymy is left unclarified. His entire reading pursues the substantiation of an assumption:

The scorpion crawls into the woman’s hut to seek respite from the incessant rain outside and having bitten the woman “risked the rain again”. One does not need to read the novel or watch the movie *Devdas* to know that many men indulge in harlot-chasing to seek temporary relief from the vagaries of a cruel, pitiless world. Importantly, the scorpion that enters the room takes shelter under a sack of rice, indicating that prostitution is the major occupation of the woman, enabling her to eke out a measly income for herself and her children. (439)

While, in my opinion, Ganguly’s interpretation fails to sustain itself textually, I admire its willingness and courage to unsettle the received meaning of a poem as canonical as this. In many ways, it was the inspiration received from Ganguly’s critical adventure with ‘Night of the Scorpion’ that birthed my own sometime in the last year. Our television was tuned in to a popular Bollywood song of the 90s – “ye bicchoo mujhey kaat khayega” (this scorpion will sting me)¹ to which my four-year old asked what a ‘bicchoo’ (scorpion) was. No sooner had I managed to describe the hairy insect to him that up popped his questions – will the insect bite the girl? Who will drive it away? Why is the girl singing and dancing instead of running away? I was, at this moment, at my wit’s end trying to explain to him that it was just a song without a real scorpion in it and that the scorpion in the song was only the handsome young man who had accidentally entered a ladies compartment on the train. Whether the child understood head or tail of what I was telling him, I have absolutely no idea – but my mind was now suddenly making rapid connections. What was it that linked a woman and a scorpion in implicit ways so that someone like me, without possessing objective knowledge of the film’s narrative context, could confirm to the child that this was, verily, not a real scorpion? Also, what if the scorpion in Ezekiel’s poem, too, was not a real scorpion in the first place?

In the last one year or so, these questions have propelled me on a consistent cultural hunt of scorpions², the findings of which, largely, constitute this paper. But before I begin, it is essential to set

out what exactly I am trying to do. I am, as is amply clear by now, attempting a new reading of Nissim Ezekiel's 'Night of the Scorpion'. This reading does not seek to dismiss/ dismantle/ replace the conventional reading of the poem but attempts to compound its meaning by adding more layers to it. There is no deconstruction on the terrain of the original meaning here. The aim, rather, is to offer an alternative cultural context in which the poem can be read and understood to generate a signification of a different kind. Needless to say, this reading discounts the poet's own biographical comment on the poem and approaches it with a complete endorsement of the poststructuralist idea of the death of the author.

As I attempted to consciously explore my conditioning, it came back to me that as far back as I could remember, scorpions had ruled the cultural imaginary of Bollywood music as metaphors of female erotic arousal and desire. I had, since my childhood, encountered scorpions in songs articulated by women on screen who pouted their lips, gyrated their hips, and pulsated and heaved emphatically in emulation of the scorpion 'bite'. So common was this trope in the semiological consciousness of Indian folk and performance practices also, that it had never once occurred to me to question the absence of a real scorpion on the scene or to theoretically evaluate the scorpion as a sign.. Now, as the parallels between such scorpion songs and Ezekiel's poem struck me, it awakened possibilities of reading the text in another contextual light.

I suddenly recalled an interesting verse from Satavahana Hala's *Gathasaptashati*. The *Gathasaptashati* (seven hundred verses in the Gatha form), one of the oldest extant anthologies of poetry from the Indian subcontinent, is largely a woman-centric book embodying verses that candidly speak of women's emotions, desires and inhibitions as daughters, wives, sisters, mothers, confidantes and prostitutes. Here is a verse from it that describes a scorpion-bite:

'A scorpion's bitten her,' they cried,
And as she thrashed about,
Her shrewd friends in her husband's presence
Rushed her to her physician-lover. (20)

The key words, here, are 'shrewd' and 'lover'. Take them away and the poem constitutes the narration of a familiar medical crisis – that of a person stung by a scorpion. Those two words, however, dramatically transform the poem's narrative. In their light, the scorpion is clearly not a real scorpion and yet can pass for one under the patriarch's (husband's) eye. Also, the scorpion-bite that needs urgent attention will be taken care of, as the poem amply clarifies, more by the lover than by the physician. Referring to the complex symbolism of the scorpion, Simona Cohen in *Animals as Disguised Symbols in Renaissance Art* writes:

The most essential characteristic of the scorpion as a universal, or archetypal, symbol is probably its ambivalence. From its known origins as a visual symbol, the awe-inspiring scorpion has embodied contrasting meanings, though often in terms that convey a kind of synthesis of opposites, rather than mutually unrelated oppositions. The scorpion symbol, as we shall see, united life and death, generation and corruption, the overt and the covert, sacred and profane, licit and illicit, and the gifts of life as well as the lurking dangers that render it so precarious. (267)

Associated in ancient astrological traditions with the eighth zodiacal constellation – Scorpio, the scorpion's connections with sexuality and fertility comes from its frequent historical representation on the human genitalia in the iconography of the Zodiac Man. In her article 'The Scorpion Apsaras at Khajuraho: Migrations of a Symbol', Cohen argues that while ancient Indian iconography emphasized the malevolent aspects of the scorpion, a perceptible change in iconographic representation was visible from the 10th century AD when the scorpion developed explicit associations with female eroticism and sexuality. (27) This change, she believes, could have been brought about through epistemological transactions with the Greeks. In her book *Scorpion*, Louise Pryke points out that archaeological remains from Mesopotamia suggest that scorpions were worshipped chiefly by

women and had erotic associations. It is possible, she writes, “that the scorpion’s intimate association with women as well as the goddess of sex may have signified the power of women’s sexuality over men. This connection may have been inspired by the observation of the female scorpion’s occasional consumption of her male lover after mating.” (66) Commenting on the symbolic significance of the sculptures of Scorpion Apsaras (celestial women depicted with scorpions on or around them) at Khajuraho (Madhya Pradesh, India), Cohen states that, in general, erotic sculptures on temples, were considered to be auspicious symbolism, “prescribed by sacred literature and *Silpa* texts for its propitious properties”. And that the “exposure of generative organs and exhibition of nudity fulfilled a magic function in plowing and sowing ceremonies, in rites to produce rain or enhance crops and in consecration ceremonies of the temple”. However the ambivalent symbol of the scorpion connoted not only the usual ideas of beauty, fertility and nature’s benevolence, but also personified “the temptations of the flesh and its perils in the broader context of man’s spiritual striving for *moksa*.” (31) Cohen discusses how gradually the scorpion as a cultural symbol of ambivalent female sexuality gained in potency, often merging into later representations of the femme-fatale *viskanya* (snake-woman).

In the musical imaginary of Bollywood, the scorpion-bite manifests itself as a frequent metaphor for illicit female erotic desire, illicit because unsanctioned by societal norms. The typical screen-character articulating such songs is a beautiful virgin who is experiencing love and the throes of desire possibly for the first time. The pathological effects of the scorpion bite – shortness of breath, the flesh turning blue, constant and throbbing localized pain in the stung area, the risk of dying due to it, and importantly, the social dimensions of the episode that leads to a communal gathering to witness and thereby legitimize the experience – are all skillfully woven into the narrative of illicit sexual desire in romantic love. While love, in general, expresses itself in Bollywood music through a host of innovative metaphors, the symbol of desire is chiefly one – the scorpion. Be it ‘Paapi Bicchua’ from the film *Madhumati* (1958), ‘Bicchhu Lad Gaya’ from *Inquilaab* (1984), ‘Mujhe Bicchhu Lad Gaya’ from *Qahar* (1997), Ila Arun’s famous music album *Bicchuda* (1994) or ‘Jab Dass Jaye Bicchua’ from *1920* (2008), to name just a few, the scorpion, each time, is unseen/unseeable and succeeds each time in stinging the victim to a state of arousal which can be calmed only by the ministrations of the lover. In performative traditions of folk and nautanki like the North Indian *Utaar Bicchhu Jhaanjhra*, the Marathi *Vinchu Chawla*, the Haryanvi *Bicchhu Bad Gaya* or the Rajasthani *Kha Gayo Beri Bicchudo*, the victim is often a married woman like the protagonist of the verse from the *Gathasaptashati* and confesses the vicious/fatal effects of her desire to a participating group of female friends who mimic the scorpion’s movements in order to simulate gestural erotic gratification.

Placed in this particular cultural context, Nissim Ezekiel’s ‘Night of the Scorpion’ offers several narrative and symbolic parallels, strongly arguing for a comparative reading. As a first, one is intrigued by the title itself which completely leaves out the mother that all conventional interpretations have chiefly focused on. ‘Night of the Scorpion’ with its structural resonance in nomenclature to the well-known movie ‘The Day of the Jackal’ speaks, like it, for only what it contains – a nocturnal narrative generated/ruled in some way by the scorpion. I will proceed to discuss the entire poem, part by part, so as to guide readers through my new interpretation.

I remember the night my mother
was stung by a scorpion. Ten hours
of steady rain had driven him
to crawl beneath a sack of rice.
Parting with his poison – flash
of diabolic tail in the dark room –
he risked the rain again. (130)

Night as a signifier, connotes many things – moral darkness, danger, desire and as compared to day, lends the right frame for my alternate reading. Rain too, evokes its own set of connotations of regeneration, fertility and desire. The ‘ten hours/ of steady rain’ seems strongly indicative of the

monsoon which is richly eulogized in Indian music ranging from classical to popular and from devotional to amorous, as the season of longing for an union between lovers. The 'sack of rice' that represents the woman's rural and mundane domestic life becomes the seat for the scorpion to conceal in and emerge from, rapidly leaving the room once the poison/sting has been parted with. Striking is the consistent reference to the scorpion throughout the poem with the masculine pronoun 'he'. Since the scorpion was hardly seen, its ready gender identification as masculine is puzzling unless, of course, one turns to the cultural tradition described in the countless songs that I have referred to where the scorpion is portrayed as a phallic metaphor stimulating female desire. Consider the next few lines of the poem:

The peasants came like swarms of flies
and buzzed the name of God a hundred times
to paralyze the Evil One.
With candles and with lanterns
throwing giant scorpion shadows
on the mud-baked walls
they searched for him: he was not found. (130)

While any personal crisis in the fabric of rural life becomes a communal crisis with the participation of the entire village community, a strong theatricality marks these lines that describe the arrival of the peasants. The simile 'swarms of flies' and the act of 'buzzing' connote a response that is orchestrated and practiced. Also, the peasants' search for the scorpion in the room following the decisive disclosure of its 'risking the rain' a few lines ago, hardly makes sense. One is also vaguely troubled by adjectives such as 'diabolical' and 'Evil' directly ascribed to the scorpion. Poisonous snakes have ravaged India's countryside for as far back as we can remember and yet, snakes in India continue to be worshipped for their power. Even in the West where the theological symbolism of the snake as diabolical dominates, it would be difficult to find direct references to live snakes as evil. What is the criterion, then, for referring to the scorpion in the poem as devilish or evil? One is immediately reminded of the song 'Paapi Bicchua' (Sinner Scorpion) from *Madhumati*. In this song, the scorpion is a sinner by virtue of symbolizing the illicit desire of a rural maiden for a dashing urban youth. Might not the peasants in the poem be passing a similar moral judgement on the unseen scorpion? YouTube videos of the nautanki 'Utaar Bicchu Jhanjhraa' portray women performing before an audience that is predominantly male and whose expressions evoke a voyeuristic pleasure in being witness to the performance of a woman's erotic angst. Among the performing women themselves, one is the chief performer – the so-called victim of the scorpion-bite while the others constitute a chorus of understanding confidantes who empathize with their friend's suffering and attempt, gesturally, to prompt her desire to orgasm in the lover's physical absence. In 'Night of the Scorpion', the peasants can be regarded as constituting both – the confidantes who realize what the woman is going through and the voyeuristic audience. The gender ambiguity of the word 'peasant' that stands for a male agricultural worker as also for the entire class of agricultural workers, appears to me to lend credibility to this idea. The 'candles', 'lanterns' and 'giant scorpion shadows' in the course of the search for a scorpion which is known to not be there, speak strongly for a theatrical tradition akin to the one performed in songs like 'Paapi Bicchua' where the search for the scorpion, rather than being realistic is only a ritual contributing to the development of the plot of erotic desire.

The next few lines of the poem have received considerable emphasis in conventional critical interpretations:

They clicked their tongues.
With every movement that the scorpion made
his poison moved in Mother's
blood, they said.
May he sit still, they said

May the sins of your previous birth
 be burned away tonight, they said.
 May your suffering decrease
 the misfortunes of your next birth, they said.
 May the sum of all evil
 balanced in this unreal world
 against the sum of good
 become diminished by your pain.
 May the poison purify your flesh
 of desire, and your spirit of ambition,
 they said, and they sat around
 on the floor with my mother in the centre,
 the peace of understanding on each face (130)

Most critics have picked on these lines to argue for the poem's manifestation of a rural fatalist thought and a quintessential Indian wisdom. They have read in it the doctrine of karma, the Hindu philosophy of reincarnation and the urge towards moksha by abnegating desire. The image of the mother in the centre and the 'peace of understanding on each face', however, reinforces my reading of the poem as a theatrical manifestation of a woman's erotic expression in line with regional and Bollywood musical traditions. In the song 'Paapi Bicchua' too, the victim finds place at the centre, the chorus surrounding her and with each member in the chorus aware of, both, the victim's tortuous desire and the punitive consequences of its consummation. The peasants' clicking of their tongues, therefore, may be looked upon as a similar performative act of commiseration and sympathy and their choral wish that the scorpion be still, that the woman's suffering diminish, and that this suffering pave the way to her fulfilment by feeding on her 'desire' and 'ambition,' seem to accrete into a theoretical discourse on the banal socio-cultural consequences of the fulfilment of desire. In her Introduction to *Translating Desire: The Politics of Gender and Culture in India*, Brinda Bose argues that "the articulation of female sexual desires, in and of itself considered a site of resistance – remains completely contained within a larger patriarchal terrain shared by warring political interest groups, in which the Right forcibly creates a nexus between morality and patriotic fervour for a "traditional" culture that we are apparently fast losing." (x) Women's sexuality is always a threat to patriarchy and hence, every measure is taken to forcibly curb or morally disfigure it in the public space. The peasants' comments on the victim's condition, then, constitute a moral policing of her desire and a reminder of her social function as a wife and mother.

My father, sceptic, rationalist,
 trying every curse and blessing,
 powder, mixture, herb and hybrid.
 He even poured a little paraffin
 upon the bitten toe and put a match to it.
 I watched the flame feeding on my mother.
 I watched the holy man perform his rite
 to tame the poison with an incantation. (130)

This stanza, again an immense favourite with critics who contrast the father's educated rationality with the unschooled superstitious imagination of the peasants, holds the key to my interpretation. Anyone who has seen the performance of the song 'Paapi Bicchua' on screen will be overpowered by its energy, compression and pace. In it too, a healer attempts to relieve the victim of her agony but no incantation can tame the poison successfully and at the song's conclusion, release comes with the arrival of the lover. In the transgressive '*Utaar Bicchoo Jhaanjhra*' too, many male relatives step forward to exorcize the scorpion – younger brother-in-law, father-in-law, elder brother-in-law. Each encounter awakens different emotions in the woman – tenderness, sweetness, happiness. However, pleasure, bliss or jouissance comes only with the engagement of the husband in the act. The song

speaks not only for the stereotypical insatiability of female desire but also the volatility and threat that it poses, when morally unchecked, to family and societal relationships. In Ezekiel's poem, therefore, the father is acutely conscious of the fracture that the metaphorical scorpion poses to his domestic space and realizes that he must attempt to quell its sting by all possible means. If he fails and the matter goes out of hand, the conventional family unit will explode. The four lines here – "trying every curse and blessing ... put a match to it" compress more physical action than has been described in the entire poem put together. To me, the hectic pace of these four lines offer a structural parallel to the husband's efforts to engage with and appease his wife, climaxing significantly on the flaming phallic toe.

After twenty hours
it lost its sting.
My mother only said
Thank God the scorpion picked on me
And spared my children. (130)

These concluding lines of the poem are so well-known that few Indian students of English will err in referencing their context. Critics have interpreted in these lines the stoic fortitude of a/n (Indian) mother who, having wrestled with the pain of a scorpion-bite for over twenty hours, only expresses her gratitude to God for having the scorpion bite her and leave her children unscathed. In the poem's conventional critical interpretation, these lines signify a linear arrival of the poem's meaning and its unambiguous closure. In my reading of it, these lines enforce a critical circularity and allow access into a hermeneutic circle where the various parts operate together to shed light on the whole. Firstly, it is only in the last line of the poem that the speaker's identity acquires some clarification. If we eschew (as we have agreed to) all biographical notes on the poem, we have no clue about the speaker except that of filial kinship with the victim-woman. The last line, for the first time, informs us that the speaker is one of the 'children' and this takes us back to the poem's first line 'I remember the night....' The poem, we now realize, is narrated through the consciousness of a child who reconstructs the memory of the mother bitten by a scorpion. The general critical trend has been to regard this child as the young Ezekiel himself and as, therefore, male. However, the poem leaves the child's gender identity unspecified. What is important here is the fact of the speaker being a child and the child's inability to have complete access to the adult epistemology of the scorpion-bite. Just as my own son, on hearing "Ye bicchoo mujhe kaat khayega" had been alarmed at the thought of a real scorpion, it is obvious that the child narrator in the poem is denied semiological access to the mother's experience and is likely to talk about it in pathological terms. Secondly, the twenty hours that the scorpion-sting lasts for, inevitably brings in another night signifying another cover of darkness for the quenching of desire. Thirdly, I would argue for a different reading of the mother's only statement in the poem – 'Thank God the scorpion picked on me/ and spared my children.' The conventional reading has been 'Thank god the scorpion picked on me, sparing thereby, my children'. I would propose – 'Thank God the scorpion picked on me and also spared my children'. The conjunction 'and' in the line is vital to my reading as it brings the disruptive erotic experience engendered by the scorpion and the socially-sanctioned space of the family undividedly together, offering the compromise of women's desire being met legitimately within the conjugal space.

One realizes that it is this possibility of female sexual desire transgressing patriarchal codes of conjugality and family honour that generates the catastrophe and potential tragedy of the night in the poem. Read in this light, the poem describes a conjugal and correspondingly, a family crisis. The scorpion of carnal desire biting the woman from underneath the unassuming domesticity of a sack of rice, disturbs the habitation structures of a rural family-unit. The village community, a participating witness to this conflict between duty and desire and the radical language of eroticism that the scorpion-bite generates in the woman, attempts to patriarchally theorize desire and to counsel and encourage the victim towards spiritual and practical sanity. It is, however, only the grim husband

who knows all that is at stake and attempts his best to pacify his wife. He succeeds after almost an entire day, with the woman rising up, in satisfied domesticity, to claim her children. However, desire as one sees it, has no closure and therefore, the elusive scorpion will always haunt women at night.

There is every possibility of this reading of the poem sounding far-fetched to anyone who is acquainted with its conventional interpretation. But then critical hermeneutics is, above all, a dialectic space, consistently questioning, contesting and updating its practice through acknowledgement of and conversation with new epistemes. Why go to laborious lengths to advocate something new when the established meaning of a text is obvious, convincing and absolutely free from loopholes, one would ask? This is because no meaning can ever be legitimately 'original' and no 'original' meaning was ever enough. There can be credible and incredible meanings, simple and complex meanings, possible and impossible meanings, complete and incomplete meanings but no 'original' meaning as such. Every new context will inspire a new reading for, as Rita Felski argues, there is no "compelling intellectual or practical reason why original context should remain the final authority and the last court of appeal." (581) The point is to understand that the referentiality of a text is never semantically and semiotically complete or closed, that texts are by nature nomadic, and as Felski puts it, "dynamic, not fixed or frozen; they speak to, but also beyond, their own moment, anticipating future affinities and conjuring up not yet imaginable connections." (579) To not recognize a text's dynamic nature and to inhibit its potential dialogue with time, place, and culture, would be to arrest its health, growth and longevity and 'Night of the Scorpion' is too significant a text in our canon to allow it to vegetate.

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Notes

¹ Arnold, Matthew, 'Shakespeare'. www.poetryfoundation.org. Accessed 11 Jan 2022.

² Keats, John, 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'. www.poetryfoundation.org. Accessed 11 Jan 2022.

³ This well-known song is from the Hindi film *Chamatkar* (1992).

⁴ I am greatly indebted to the research article 'Sinner Scorpions and Erotic Women: Interspecies Imaginaries in Indian Song-and-Dance Sequences' by Rishika Mehrishi for offering intellectual strength and support to my ideas and for widening my horizon in the specific performative tradition.

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Representation, Representativeness and ‘Non-Representational’ Art^{*}

CHARLES ALTIERI

I

Kazimir Malevich spoke of his *Suprematism* as offering a mode which “represents the signs of a force” and of his representing “the energies of black and white” so that they serve “to reveal the forms of action”. Piet Mondrian made similar statements about representing “balanced relations which are the purest representation of universality, of the harmony and unity which are inherent characteristics of the mind”.¹ If we were to take such statements as naive or desperate evocations of neo-Platonist spiritualism, we would have a good deal of company among art historians. But we would ignore both the distinctive conceptual intelligence of these artists and the challenge they offer us to develop a concept of representation capacious enough to incorporate what we usually consider to be “presentational” strategies. The aesthetics developed as a response to these presentational features – in Suzanne Langer, in the British tradition inaugurated by Fry and Bell, and even in much Heideggerian discourse about immanence (some of it mime?) will not suffice in itself. At best it pertains only to the Romantic heritage. And while it explains the immediacy of response and the effects of form, it has no interpretive category for the various rhetorical aspects which distance us from what is presented and guide our interpretive reflections on it.

It is thus all too obvious that neither conventional ideas of representation nor of presentation will suffice as a general account of art’s powers to implicate extra-textual dimensions of experience. Both concepts, I think, are too concerned with the direct relationship between signs and the world – either as a resemblance or as a direct experience. I shall propose instead a rhetorical view which emphasizes the self-conscious use of signs as mediations defined by possible uses, some of which involve conventional representation and others conventional presentation. Both uses share at least one basic function: They invite an audience to identify with some feature of the work on its mimetic or authorial level so that the work can be experienced as representative. The representative work is one that exemplifies in a way that allows members of an audience to see that each of them can participate in the life of the work while recognizing that the same possibility holds for others. Kant saw this state as the image art gives of the moral order, but I will be content if it helps us avoid the mental cramps that develop when we strain to see art, always in a two-term, work-referent model. If I am correct, the theory of representation makes sense as a comprehensive theory of art so long as we recall the connection of mimesis with rhetoric, which gets lost once philosophy develops empiricist standards for judging the “accuracy” of a representation. Representation makes sense and includes presentational elements so long as we take a rhetorical stance equating representation with the way a work becomes representative for an audience connecting it to some area of experience.

I understand “representation” as a use of signs to “make present” phenomena from which the sign differs and yet, in and as its difference, confers certain characteristics on the phenomenon or places it in a set of practices. A flag does not represent a flag, but it can represent a nation or, in another register, a kind of cloth. Exemplifications are representations because they alter the mode of presence – they use particulars to elicit a sense of class terms not typically associated with the entity.

Theories of representation are theories of how the sign which differs from what it represents can take on that additional signification and how it can be itself and a figure within a larger practice. Those influenced primarily by empiricist theory, even if not in its cruder "pictorial" models of the sign, will define that signification primarily in terms of resemblance or how the sign stands for a phenomenon. My rhetorical approach must also treat this as standing for a relation-ship, but it subordinates the static parameters typically invoked to define resemblance to concerns based on possible use values. Thus 'acting for' becomes, in my view, a more inclusive and more flexible class of relations than 'standing for'. This is why representativeness, a condition of actions and examples, strikes me as a concept that can subsume what is valuable about representation theory. Thus I shall try to understand the representativeness of art as a process within our cultural practices, whereby we are invited to identify with a variety of stances – from simulacra of experience projected within the mimetic level of a text, to conditions "representing" possible worlds, to the overall attitude displayed on the authorial level as the work's most comprehensive compositional purposiveness.² We then can treat "uptake" as a matter of reflecting on the possible use of what is represented or exemplified in a text, whether or not it fits the present criteria of "truth".

Representation and presentation lose their oppositional qualities and become means to the same end, while the emphasis on possible worlds provides a theoretical space for understanding why art as exemplification has so often been considered a means of instruction or vehicle for idealization. So long as we remain, however covertly, obsessed with the "truth" of art as in some sense a documentary of external states of affairs, plausible psychology, or realms of ideal universals, we will find its engagement in projection and idealization an embarrassment.³ A rhetorical concept of representative-ness, on the other hand, precisely fits these desires of artworks to extend beyond the boundaries of the specific action they display. Such extensions need not involve truth claims and a hypothetic-deductive model of enquiry, yet they do allow us to speak of several modes of possible significance. The old dichotomy between referential ideas of representation and aestheticist models of autonomy is not our only framework.

II

I shall use as the vehicle for my arguments a visual example, Malevich's *Suprematist Composition: Red Square and Black Square*, because the work's significance clearly eludes both representational and formalist aestheticist categories. We need the terms of presentational aesthetics, but they do not suffice for the intellectual and affective complexity inherent in Malevich's simplicity of surface. Because my concerns are theoretical, I shall treat the painting schematically and shall somewhat simplify, although I hope not to distort, Malevich's intentions.⁴ Moreover, my reading will be perhaps excessively "literary," but the painting invites such thematizing. I by no means assume, that other non-iconic works sustain the same style of enquiry, but I do consider my arguments about mind, movement, and elements metaphors for what takes place in Kandinsky as a musical notation of colour and in Mondrian as the relation of literal forces held in balance. All the major first-generation, non-iconic painters sought ways of making art embody the sensuality of the mind while insisting that as an act of the mind, the very processes objectified retained what Malevich called a principle of non-objectivity. What draws us to the elements leads us to an elemental sense of force and movement no materialist language can describe or account for.

If we provisionally treat the painting in three conceptual stages, we will be able to see just how this movement emerges and signifies as "representation" of "the forms of action". The first stage consists of a series of dynamic principles involved in subverting a potential domination of black. Imagine this work upside down. Everything would achieve rest in the black square, and all the movement and openness would be negated. Here, instead, every-thing denies resolution by that single shape. As the eye moves down to the conventional place of rest, it finds sharp contrast and reversal. The smaller square is by far the more active, because its tilt denies the coordinates established by the black square,

while its primary colour leaps forward from the canvas. The tilt, in turn, opens out into white space, and it asserts, in its small but almost weightless presence, a powerful refusal to echo the black squares echoing the shape of the picture frame. The red's projection forward is duplicated then by its horizontal movement as each denies an order of repetitive form.

The very elementariness of these relations invites us to bring thematic analogues into our visual experience. Too bare to be decoration, the work must signify. And its contrasts fulfil this expectation. Thus on a second level, we reflect upon the "meaning" of the tilt. In simple movement, a separate world is born. Elements themselves project intentionality because the red square introduces the possibility of the canvas enclosing more than one world: the red produces spatial coordinates which entail a different schema, a different model for processing information, and relations to other phenomena. Autonomy becomes a visual experience. In fact, autonomy rendered spatially becomes a remarkably complex visual experience because we see of what it is made – namely, opposition and difference. The bareness of the canvas virtually reduces to the semiotic categories of opposition that make the assertion of autonomous identity possible. For the red square to establish its force, colour requires non-colour, smallness a corresponding larger shape for contrast, new space an old set of coordinates, singleness duality, and freedom or difference a sense of imminent norms and perhaps immanent oppression.

All these forces, we must remember, are at once extremely abstract and yet absolutely literal. Our thematic reflections do not depend on some virtual drama interpreted from the painting but simply describe the force of a concrete set of relations staged as art and hence as inviting us to reflect upon what they can be said to display. Thus on a third level, the painting can be seen as directly addressing the idea of what sustains and grounds the relations and the reflections they allow. But I have been too abstract to capture the significance of these meta-reflections. We must attend to the range of lyrical effects created by the specific way the red square tilts. Visually, it at once leads us out to the surrounding white space and, by that relation, creates or restores a delicate balance with the very figure of order whose demands for repetition it had denied. In studying theosophy, Malevich also learned the dynamics of Hegelian logic. By negating one form of order, the black square's, the red tilt makes the eye seek out larger contexts. In these contexts, we recover a new balance; indeed, we recover a new principle of balance. Instead of balance based on the repetition of shape, we have a balance that in or as movement integrates all the diverse elements. The very pull among the competing coordinates and forms literally produces a sense of their interdependence, while that interdependence has its ground in the white space of canvas. This ground, like the mind and like infinite space, holds all by allowing what is held to become manifest as force and as relationship: "Tranquility itself is defined by movement".⁵

I allow myself the luxury of citing Malevich because statements like these justify taking such complex presentations of balancing force as thematic – that is, as self-conscious figurings of how the painter can understand the powers he has practiced or brought into being. Here the very process of reading this painting in levels allows us to reflect on the strange ontological properties of its elements. Because there is nothing virtual about the painting, it can be said to signify nothing beyond itself. It simply is – as a structure of shapes, colours, and movements. We cannot read these as means intended to represent or stand for something else. Yet as we meditate on the painting, we also cannot treat its literalness as simply physical. What we see, what is only physical form and movement, nonetheless grows in sense so that sense itself becomes an elemental condition bridging the mental and physical. At each level of the painting, its elements signify while never taking any of the allegorical or representational forms of our typical signifying codes. It is as if we were in the presence of a pure form of signification – of the mind in elements and elements in mind – which needs no specific structure of representations. One might say that Malevich sought a form of meaning or something like a Kantian schema which captured semantic force without any of the positivities of semantic content, which are subject to historical displacements.⁶ The meaning of this painting is simply its structure as a force.

Yet its force involves both the series of physical movements we have been discussing and the process of mental movements that recover that literal force. I border here on mysticism, on Malevich's "meaning," so perhaps the best I can do is offer a simple emblem for what I am trying to say about sense in spirit and spirit in the literalness of sense. We must be spiritually moved by the painting in order to experience its physical movement as fully present in its elemental concreteness. Change and meaning become conditions of re-appropriating the life in what we normally see only as already constituted for interpretive sight. Now we are asked to step back and reflect upon the mystery of sense in sensation and the sensation of sense.

As we step back, two further figural extensions of these movements appear possible. They will not be necessary for my argument, but they should help extend its analogical force, so I will briefly indulge in spelling them out. Malevich, we know, desired to produce through paintings a condition of non-objectivity where art captures permanent conditions of "spiritual" force. As one version of the non-objective, "consider" again the nature of the tilt which breaks repetition, creates new coordinates of sense, and opens the possibility and necessity of new forms of balance or coherence among conflicting forces. The tilt itself can be equated with a fundamental force of differentiation; itself never locatable except in the movement it imposes by making us seek new balances. I allude, of course, to Derrida. But here a picture is worth a thousand philosophers: The visual example enables us to see what Derrida imagines – indeed what all thinkers of the self as negation from Hegel to Sartre have imagined. The principle of autonomy is in essence a principle of the tilt of the possibility of new coordinates of desire and interpretation entering an objective, cognitive world. The analytic philosopher and conceptual artist John Perry provides a concrete basis for such attributions in his indexical definitions of self. Self, in my somewhat reductive version of his argument, is not a property agents possess but a function or condition of experience whereby the use of the indexical "I" makes possible "a crossing of life and cognition".⁷ The "I" takes up the world from a point of view: The world does not change, but the investments it allows and sustains do. We approximate here Lacan's "imaginary" – that is, an inescapable source of erotic energies and of an ego ideal/ideal ego which has, in effect, no content but can be characterized as a demand to produce investments allowing an agent to make identifications within positions he occupies in language.

If this tilt will figure the self as a principle of difference, if it figures the imaginary, will it not also present (or represent) the nature of the artwork itself in its non-objectivity? The movement of sense and signification is insistently physical yet entirely dependent on the painting as an organizing point of view. The objects as they take meaning here cannot be substituted, even though each element is infinitely reproducible. So in their very affirmation of the objective sense, the force of this painting in balance insists also on their non-objectivity or untranslatability. The painting is at once within the world and not congruent with it – as is perhaps indicated by the way my attempts at critical description border on the parodic. Roland Barthes coined the concept of *textuality* in order to indicate how certain relations in an artwork resist all naturalizing interpretations. Malevich's point is more general: Even what invites figural elaboration in its ideal specificity as a locus of self-generated forces and stimulus to audience meditation remains ineluctably different from all our efforts to appropriate it. The artwork must, to be an artwork, retain its own control over the coordinates that generate its sense of sense.

III

I must now face my own problem of representativeness. How does so obviously an extreme example allow us to make generalizations on the subject of representation in art? On one level, the challenge is clear: Malevich's stylistic strategies are presentational, while his language for them is representational. So he focusses the question of how we can correlate presentational elements – the signifying force of what artworks display in actions or movements – with representational elements that allow the work to stand for non-aesthetic properties of experience. The problem is complicated, however, by the fact that we do not normally govern our critical practice by clear and distinct ideas of either

presentational or representational elements. Yet the practices betray biases and assumptions that are often reductive in what they take as central and problematic in the links they draw between art and the world. I hope, then, to use my reading of force and exemplification in Malevich as a way of bringing to the surface confusions or limitations of the assumptions often underlying representational theories. As these become clear, we will see why deconstruction seems so appealing an alternative but from a perspective which I think can lead us to concepts not so dependent upon the oppositions deconstruction feeds upon. My intention is not to refute deconstruction (one does not refute a practice) but to show how it is one limited way of serving the end I call representativeness.

We must ask first what views of representation are incompatible with Malevich's work and the modernist strategies it typifies. Clearly, the work does not picture states of affairs – whether they be facts in the world, states of mind, or some version of universals or types. Yet while ideals of descriptive resemblance often creep into our critical practice and evaluations, they are not central to any sophisticated theory of representation in art. Gombrich's work is typical. Representation is not a matter of producing replica but of constructing salient resemblances which "suggest" or "evoke" a referent. Representation works when it "retains the efficacious nature of the prototype" because it preserves the relevant "context for action". These contexts, I take it, can be either realistic (questions of how something appears) or symbolic (questions of what universal conditions are illustrated).⁸ From my point of view, this idea of contexts for action is an extremely promising one. But Gombrich's dislike of expressionism and non-iconic art make it appear that he confines the idea to contexts constructed as ideas or tonal qualities of depicted worlds which pre-exist and thus authenticate the representation. Thus while Gombrich denies a simple copy theory of representation, his values, his sense of what is salient in paintings and what authenticates them, suggests that he retains from that theory its hierarchy of fit: representations are tested by their power to evoke some truth within a culture's beliefs about the "actual" world (which can be an abstract, mythic one).

Malevich's painting challenges these assumptions primarily by the emphasis it puts on representation as itself a condition of action in the process of interpreting itself and thus of making special demands on the ways an audience understands the directions of fit between the work, its activity, and the world. More important than any state of affairs evoked or suggested by the configurations of the image is the nature of the process displayed by the work. What links to the world is less some condition symbolized than the processes displayed in the art act, which evoke qualities of mind that can transcend art. As Maurice Denis put it in one of the texts most influential in modernism's challenge to older aesthetic, our overwhelming impressions need not "emerge from the motif or the objects of nature represented, but form the representation itself, from forms and coloration".⁹ Malevich's painting, for example, uses its non-iconic properties to make the entire work a pure display of the very energies its shapes allow us to treat as significant. Picture and picturing are correlative. And because of this, the specific portrayal seems inseparable from an abstract schema exemplifying the very ideas of creativity it elicits. The painting is simultaneously a display, a metacommentary, and an invitation for us to take it as a pure schematic form applicable, as shape and as movement, to a wide variety of particulars. Moreover, the work's significance lies not only in this complex presentation but also in the ordered movement of reflective discovery it invites from its audience. The control of temporal movement is a feature of artistic experience which no spatial model of resemblance will capture, especially when the sense of unfolding in time reinforces and extends the state of being displayed in the work as its authorial act. Similarly, I can imagine no way to describe in traditional theories of representation the way Malevich's work insists on its own condition as difference, at once within the physical world and negating it. Finally, theories which ignore such phenomena have great trouble explaining the way interpretation actually functions in art. If works represent states of affairs, then it makes sense to focus interpretation on the specific ways something is represented. The interpreter wants us to notice how the work treats some feature of the world and allows us to make predictions about it. But with works like Malevich's, and I think with most great

works, interpretation is more Whiteheadian. Rather than emphasizing the ideas we get about objects, we treat those ideas as lures for feelings which deepen our appreciation of the specific action taking place in the entire structure of relations held in specific tensions by the work. It is the dynamics of interpretation which constitutes a complex condition of action in relation to display, and this conjunction produces or can produce genuine originality. Such works require a theory of representation that takes into account the conditions of possibility they display and evoke. This theory will use the display function as a way of preserving the realm of meaning in the text. The invitation is not to make just any response but to fill out the configuration the text offers and to attempt identifying with it. Then, because provisional identification is possible with what the text displays or schematizes as meaning, we have a way of moving from the author's meaning to the use of such meaning in possible worlds. This is a plausible measure of significance.¹⁰

IV

Expressionist or presentational theories will explain some of these phenomena. But such theories involve serious problems of locating the source of expression – in the work or in the maker – and they repeat the same problem on the level of response. What does one do with an expression – try to repeat the original experience or emphasize one's immediate reactions to the work's expressive properties? In either case, Gombrich is right to insist that expressionist theory has difficulty coming to terms with the rhetorical features of expression that, as mediations, require interpretation of structures and meanings which cannot be reduced to responses to the work's manifest qualities. As evidence for Gombrich's views, we need only note how the brilliant observations of British art historians from Roger Fry to Harold Osborne rarely produce a full semantic account of a picture's import. Similar problems plague the expressionism that extends from Dewey and Collingwood to Guy Sircello: Emphasis on experience never quite coincides with a full discourse about meaning. Some expressionist theories do isolate my central concerns – the quality of display in the art act, the power of movement in and through the work, and the understanding of interpretive fit as a relationship between examples and possible worlds. But so long as they must define their terms in sharp opposition to the reductionism that often accompanies resemblance views of representation, they are likely to lapse into psychologism or formalism. When faced with Gerald Graff using an ideal of representation to dismiss most literature in the Romantic tradition or with Gombrich's dislike of non-iconic art, it is tempting to base one's counterarguments simply on the features of form or the evocativeness they ignore. However, we then keep repeating the same oppositions.

For this, I have a strong antidote. It may not cure, but it should help us enjoy the disease while we come to see what elements must be integrated if there is to be a comprehensive theory of representativeness adequate to what Malevich displays. I want to spend a few moments on Jacques Derrida's analysis of how the conventional poles of presentation and representation are condemned to undermining one another's lives while deferring one another's deaths. The following passage seems to me Derrida's most concise trooping on the topic:

If we are to understand Cezanne's sentence, the truth (presentation or representation, unveiling or adequation) must be rendered "in painting" either by presentation or by representation, according to the two models of truth. Truth, the painter's model, must be rendered in painting according to the two models of truth. Henceforth, the abyssal expression "truth of the truth," which will have made it be said that the truth is the nontruth, can be crossed with itself according to all sort of chiasmi, according as one determines the model as presentation or as representation. Presentation of the representation, presentation of the presentation, representation of the representation, representation of the presentation.¹¹

If we abstract from Derrida's playful spirit, we can see him identifying four specific problems reinforcing and paralyzing the traditional oppositions I have been speaking of – the force of signification seems always to evade representation and yet elicit it; the artist's model of truth conflicts with her model of art; the power to claim "truth" confuses the adequacy of representations with the

force of rhetoric; the desire to represent that force creates an endless regress of signs in search of a source they endlessly supplement and displace. The “ground” for such deconstruction appears in Wittgenstein. Where the *Tractatus* thought of representation in the pictorial form ArB, the *Philosophical Investigations* led us to view any description of such acts as entailing an agent S, a special sense of r in terms of the as or specific kind of equivalence established and a sense of some conditions of uptake Q, which we can treat loosely here as symbolizing all the intended effects the work may have on an audience and for the artist’s psyche and career. Thus we need to identify in our account of representation how S ArB Q can be accomplished. Derrida points the way by contrast, for he shows that each symbol identifies a point of slippage which renders representation a problematic, but probably inescapable, concept.

Let me spell out only the problem of intentionality, the condition of agency S in representation, as an example of what Derrida recognizes and what artists like Malevich grapple with. Derrida tries to make us see that intentionality cannot be the purely transcendental openness Husserl dreamed of and analytic thought tried to secure by strategies modelled on Russell’s theory of types. As Sartre demonstrated, representation takes place from a position and a desire always surpassing or placing elsewhere what it attends to. The *re* in representation must be taken seriously because it calls our attention to an act of purposive presentation inseparable from the desired process of impersonal description. The S will prove to never be a neutral observer’s stance but instead will combine roles of projection and depiction. And this means that the entire representational process will always be at once overdetermined (by the force of presentation) and undetermined (by carrying insufficient evidence for deciding on the tasks the representation is actually intended to do). Understanding art as the imitation of models confuses ideals of description and constructing works of art that satisfy aesthetic standards, and the pursuit of truth demands rhetorical efforts to displace other dominant versions of the subject.

These problems are not merely epistemological delicacies teased out of the tantalizing ambiguity between subjective and objective genitive in the expression “sign of”. Rather they implicate many of the emotional issues of the relation between positions and descriptions which one might say has become the central topic of contemporary thought. Political cases of representation most clearly illustrate the complexity – for example, in what might be called the dilemma of the politician in a representative government.¹² We expect standing for and acting for to be congruent features of representation: The politician should manage in a disinterested way to act on behalf of interests which are in effect objectively determined by elections. Yet even deciding whom she represents involves two models – the empirical or actual interests of their constituents and the “real” or ideal interests that in her best judgement serve the “true” public interest. Yet the choice of whom to represent is very difficult to separate from how the representor’s interests might at once be served and remain hidden. Whom she represents depends on what self she chooses or needs to present, and that need may, in turn, involve representations which mask it.

We might put the same case in more general terms by saying that treatments of representation by thinkers such as Foucault, Derrida, and Goffman conceive descriptions as more “like” letters of recommendation than like accounts conventionally idealized as scientifically objective. They see idealization and description as interdependent and thus as generating conflicting notions of truth. Consider as a philosophical parable the case of the student who asked a famous professor for a letter of recommendation but was told he could have only a letter of description. In this parable, the object, the social practice, and the representing force are all at odds, and each has a different interest in the process of description. The professor wants his authority properly represented in his act, so he hopes that his picture will reflect his (idealized) character by showing how he refuses to idealize at least this student. (For many of us, all our descriptions of our students have qualities of recommendation because they are our students and “must” represent something of us.) Yet the professor’s “honesty” in one dimension becomes dishonesty in others – not only because another fantasy shapes the presenting energy but also because the refusal to recommend can be more severely marked as negative by the institu-

tional "model" (everybody writes "recommendations") than the agent intends in picturing his "model". Finally, consider the poor candidate for description, cast in his powerlessness as merely an object not worth the effort to falsify which guarantees the "truth" of the message. He experiences the painful vulnerability of having to recognize that description may not capture his "truth" but instead is, from his point of view, distorted by the very authorial act which should guarantee his distinctiveness.

V

Given the luscious ambiguities in concepts like representation and mimesis, it is not easy to say why we should not simply trace their various ways of folding into and displacing one another. Here, by what Geoffrey Hartman calls reading against the text, we can even construct a benign deconstruction that preserves one form of the complexity of spirit. Yet such a choice would condemn us to leaving unexplored two significant alternatives. If we assume that artists honoured by our traditions are generally wiser than most of their critics, of whatever persuasion, it is likely that we will see the problems, and perhaps even possible solutions, more fully if we read with or read through the text than if we read against it. Certainly, Malevich's tilt reflects a profound meditation on precisely these problems of understanding how art can "represent" its own presentational force. Thus, second, it might be possible to construct from such artworks a view of the concept of representation capacious enough to preserve the vitality and complexity of fascinating fields of play like Derrida's without itself being so thoroughly subject to the endless play of vacillating oppositions. Perhaps one can see presentation and representation, or idealization and description, less as oppositions than as complementary ways of pursuing a single end. Such an account can also have an important historical dimension because it should be able to explain why presentational aesthetics developed precisely at the time when the tension between the idealizing and descriptive features of representation could no longer be concealed by symbolic and mythic strategies.

I wish to show that a rhetorical view of representation as representative-ness can accomplish such a reconciliation. First, we must distinguish representation as a question of how the mind relates to the world from the specific conditions of art where signs stand in what can be a culturally grounded relationship to a sense of realities outside, beyond, or through the work.¹³ In this latter context, representation can be a matter of representativeness – not a function of how signs project resemblance to states of affairs but a surrogate inviting an audience to take it as something to be identified with by projecting a possible world. The work uses aesthetic conventions to focus attention on the process of provisionally identifying with the stances, movements, or qualities of perception it constructs so that one can reflect on how they might relate to a variety of existential conditions. The signs in art must still stand for some elements of ordinary experience, but the idea of invitation puts the emphasis on how they act for or act as what they elicit. Malevich's force depends on our accepting the work as potentially schematic and, hence, as a set of conditions of action or relation we all share. When we ask, "Schematic of what?", we begin to see that artworks often reverse the normal standing-for-acting for the relationship we find in politics. To the extent that artworks exemplify new configurations, we project what they stand for largely by construing how they act. And acting for is not a relation to an already existing community but a relation to a community one projects through the construction of a world one can identify with.¹⁴

Representativeness can be a property of any features of the work which allows projective identifications. Nonetheless, the fullest constructed world will obviously be created by our putting together the entire art symbol as a hierarchical organization of meanings. By identifying the authorial stance we establish the richest parameters for identifications. Thus a novel like *Anna Karenina* represents on one level the possible feelings of an adulteress and on another a complex stance towards domesticity and self-discipline. If one follows up on my comments to ask what specific condition of acting for takes place in *Red Square and Black Square*, one begins to get at the profound metaphysical shift Malevich inaugurated and the complexity of what I call critical situating required to get at

this shift. As pure elemental relations, the painting acts for some transpersonal shapes and movements which in their materiality implicate and display conditions of creative intentionality set in the process of a self-contextualizing balance.

The most important achievement of this definition is that it avoids all temptations to collapse the epistemological force of art into any single relation of resemblance or standing for some existing state of affairs. And that means dispelling the myth of foundationalism for literature. I take as my motto for representativeness Wallace Stevens's dictum, "The measure of the poet is the measure of his sense of the world and of the extent to which it involves the sense of other people".¹⁵ From this, we can see why various forms of realism and resemblance models of representation have strong appeal in art and philosophy. If a description is true of a state of affairs, it is transpersonal and in effect compels us to acknowledge that it has representative force for all those who subscribe to the system of evaluation involved. Yet this view of description leaves unresolved the old bugaboo of empiricist theory: how can one give a mentally acute theory of bodily activities governed by sensation. My view does, I think, account for this matter of the possible force of representations. We find them producing significant possibilities for reflecting on conditions of actions. And this view enables us to treat "realism" as having force less on descriptive than on loosely ethical or pragmatic grounds. Fidelity of resemblance matters to the extent that it can be shown to facilitate significant identifications. Graff and Lukacs are wrong in rooting a work's authority in the descriptive accuracy of its signs. Rather, the relevant question is Brecht's: What can this configuration of signs enable us to project in self-reflection about our lives, and how can it show that such identifications matter? Description is only one of many ways to connect signs and worlds, and empirical models of coherence control only some modes for appealing to representativeness.

By shifting to projective and pragmatic terms, we obviously run the danger of tempting critics to impose a single "authentic ethic," just as others try to impose a single "reality". But an emphasis on identifications also allows us to specify how criticism can serve ethical ends that do not collapse into any single dogma.¹⁶ By proposing as its basic value the possibility of significant identifications, my view at least implies a preference for preserving texts as different from one another and us. Identifications grow feeble if they repeat themselves. So there are strong pragmatic grounds for insisting on principles like intentions in the text as our means of saving ourselves to some extent from projecting our own already constituted identities upon it. There are other available strategies, but, as I have suggested, the ideas of masterpieces and authority suggest that authors will do better for us the job of constructing possible worlds than we will do by critical deformations worked out according to our own powers and guidelines. Conversely, the possibility of rich identification serves as a useful, if not very rigorous, guideline for resolving critical knots or evaluating competing critical perspectives. The measure of a critical stance – in general and in relation to particulars – becomes how fully it allows us to recover whatever force led readers we respect (or wish to identify with) to value the work as they did. If this goal is acknowledged, the practice of criticism involves trying out various paths to this representativeness. Treating Malevich as a formalist, for example, simply blocks the possibility of understanding how he, and we, could conceive abstraction as a philosophical drama. Some critical paths lead to dead ends or to mere repetition, others allow us to see how the elements of a work establish rich possibilities of identification. "Rich" remains a contested term, but we at least know what kind of argument we must employ to justify its use.

VI

Once we adopt a rhetorical stance towards representativeness, we put ourselves in a position where many of the conventional oppositions lose their force, and it becomes possible to describe without endless vacillation some of the social roles art and criticism can play. We still need distinctions between representation and presentation, but since the aim is not description the two need not be in pure conflict. Both are means for achieving the same end – possible self-conscious identifications in

specific works as representative of human possibilities. Therefore, an aesthetic theory can try to combine elements of each in its overall design. Theory can hope to account for the force of expressive acts and authorial presence while also adapting itself to questions of structure and deliberate mediation hard to reconcile with presentational theories.

The process of untangling and re-tangling old oppositions is a complex one. Here I can only indicate some of the possibilities that I think follow from the overall shift I propose. Most important is the different attitude we are allowed to take towards the expressive or presentational force. Conventional models of representation as mimesis tend to share the distinction in analytic philosophy between propositional attitudes and the actual proposition. Only the latter easily lends itself to their principles of assessment. Similarly, mimetic theory concentrates on what the text's argument or plot captures. It is paralyzed by authorial investments which change during the course of a work or, more generally, by the action of an authorial sensibility within the structure of resemblances to the world. These are too much like letters of recommendation. If, on the other hand, we emphasize the possible representativeness of a work, the attitude or stance displayed becomes a crucial factor. What links the work to the world is less what it says than what it demonstrates itself as doing in relationship to the world. The presenting activity has representative consequences. For movement, as in Malevich, is precisely what allows the work to have force as a possible display of conditions for acting and reflecting on actions. The work can interpret the very processes of its own rhetorical construction.

My move to rhetoric only holds off Derridean oppositions on one level, although quite a significant one. What can be presented without the displacing energies of descriptive representation remains a matter of degree. Any discussion of intentions opens on to endless regress: We can ask about intending to intend or needing to represent what is presented. Nonetheless, it is precisely against the backdrop of this regress that we can see how much the rhetorical view gains for us. So long as we must represent the presentational act in another medium, we will have translation problems and undeterminations that invite deconstruction. But we can still distinguish from the translational aspect of interpretation, the process by which interpretation serves simply as a means to fill out the lures for feeling engendered by the display function of the art object. As we saw in terms of the invitation in Malevich's painting, interpretation can be content with two senses of reading *through* a work. The interpreter brings dialectical pressure on the work so that its internal movements become purposive, and she tries to see through that movement what can be exemplified as a possible state of being in the world to be reflected upon. There is in principle, and as a possibility of critical practice, no need to translate the exemplified art into some overall meaning stateable in other terms. It is sufficient to identify possible ramifications in what is displayed.¹⁷

Much depends here on the account of the display one can produce for a theory of representativeness. I have discussed various features of the topic in my work on literature as performance, so I will confine myself here to two features of the display made basic and coherent within the view I have been arguing. First, the display becomes a prominent distinguishing feature between epistemological and rhetorical or artistic concepts of representation. In epistemology, thinkers like Wittgenstein, Quine, and Rorty have argued that one can do without the concept of representation entirely.¹⁸ What we need to test warrantable assertions is not some putative resemblance between pictures in the mind and facts in the world but simply some measure of how linguistic formulations affect practices. No discussion of mediation will have any authority or role to play independent of actual stimuli and results. Or to put the case the other way around, it is very difficult to imagine an account of mental representation since virtually anyone will prove compatible with practical experience. So why bother with representation at all? S ArB collapses into the equivalence of Q. But such an account does not fit any view of art that emphasizes the specificity and ideality of the work, the state of difference it produces, or the practices of interpretation attentive to qualities not reducible to hypothetical-deductive reasoning. All these attributes depend on our concern for preserving the work as a particular idea or model to be reflected upon, and we want to locate its ideality in its capacity to exemplify as a specific configuration of experience general enough to apply to a variety of contexts.

Wittgenstein elicited the distinctive sense of experience I am after in his remarks on “sameness” in art. For example, “You could select either of two poems to remind you of death, say. But supposing you had read a poem and admired it, could you say: Oh, read the other, it will do the same”.¹⁹ If we are to have such specificity, we cannot collapse the object into a range of stimuli equivalent to some relevant practice. This would collapse forms or ends into means and make irrelevant the artist’s effort to create a type, or exemplification, which is appreciated in part because it produces shareable identifications we can discuss as particular models. We need to preserve the specific shape of the mediation. What matters is not Q but the exemplification established by the SArB relation. We are concerned not with the motion Malevich’s picture causes but with the distinctive qualities of the specific way the work presents relationships demonstrating and interpreting processes of balancing.

At this point, it becomes necessary again to resist the temptation to treat what art pictures as a description. The representational structure need not refer to existing states of affairs precisely because we preserve all of its configurational elements. The display is thus free to apply to possible situations: The work becomes an element of our grammar, not of our stock of truths. And as such an element, there is no problem with idealization or with closure. Idealization is simply built into art by virtue of the fact that it invites us to try on possible attitudes. We come to art knowing that it can project a variety of presentational modes – from pure fantasy to pure description – and a variety of ways of accounting for its own rhetoric as a means for developing the mode. Artworks can be dialectical engagements with precisely the tensions Derrida articulates. But they neither need deconstruction nor deconstruct themselves because they offer themselves simply as conditions of possible identifications. Malevich, in fact, has his work exemplify precisely the condition of ideality which is the state of difference art produces in its refusal to be subsumed under any specific existential description. Yet even this has representative functions that lead beyond art, that suggest basic possible attributes in any condition of ecstasy or of intentionality.

Often, the work will project both a condition of possibility and a plausible way of testing those possibilities. This I take to have been the project of many 19th-century novelists. *Middlemarch* projects a model of reading society and human actions which in turn is imaginatively tested by its events. The book’s concern, then, is less with resembling states of affairs than with inviting us to try on what the text exemplifies as an ideal in order to explore a better way of reading than we ordinarily practice. The descriptive adequacy is rhetorical means, not a thematic end. Yet we ignore this point constantly in our fear of closure by acting as if the work wanted to impose its descriptive categories as exclusive interpretive ones. It is, of course, possible and sometimes necessary to idealize counter-ideals and to exemplify attitudes devoted to resisting the imposition of types. Yet it is equally possible and necessary to try out possible forms of totalizing interpretation. Closure, in other words, is a projected ideal to be tested as such. We can take the effort as a description and exalt it into a dogma. But we can carry anything to extremes. We come much closer to the way works project identifications if we take the effort to produce closure as simply a rhetorical, imaginative test of how far a given stance will take us. The end is not to close off other ways of reading but to project the possibilities inherent in one attitude or mode of integrative thought. To stress only resistance to closure is like reading Malevich’s painting only for the tilt, without attention to its quest for a composing balance that idealizes a presentational force capable of regathering what desire sunders.

I do not intend to suggest that because art is an invitation to provisional identifications that it is culturally benign. Art has culturally constructive roles. Of this, we occasionally need reminding. But all invitations have their demonic features. Representativeness, like representing, involves wills to power. But by stressing representativeness we can preserve the extensive and rich features of the work of art which function as display and allow us to judge in terms of our identifications the nature and value of the power projected. Artists can give audiences credit for recognizing and using in their own ways what gets exemplified as forms of power. There remain, of course, forms of power which are not exemplified, not self-consciously displayed by a work but hidden in it or hidden by it. Of these, I can only say that a rhetorical approach to representation puts suspicion back in the right place

or at least in the dramatically most interesting place. Stanley Cavell argues that philosophy's mistake is assuming that scepticism is only a philosophical problem rather than one deeply embedded in difficulties of establishing human trust and shareable projects.²⁰ Similarly, much of modern theory errs by treating the source of suspicion in art as an epistemological condition located in signs and a problematic of description. Art's danger is far more serious – we must suspect the very condition of agency, which offers the work to us as a structure of possibilities. Only by such extreme measures can we at once defend ourselves against being taken in and recognize the full joy of finding a community based on invitations that resist our attempts to discredit them. The condition of resistance is precisely the condition which allows us to surpass tests of description and to explore what imaginative identifications with a range of works will produce as criteria of judgement.

VII

Because so much of this chapter is obviously addressed to problems most pressing upon literary critics, I want to conclude by stating why Malevich seems to me so useful a representative for my case. (I might add that if *La Verite en Peinture* is a sign, art critics will soon face the same problems their literary brethren do.) The primary connections are historical. Non-iconic painting has qualities of literalness and immediacy which allow it to exemplify better than any literary work the properties most important to the presentational aesthetics of modernism. It is fairly easy to show how these properties become important because of the painters' and poets' profound distrust of a representational heritage no longer able to hide problematic transitions between empirical descriptions, type universals, and idealizing recommendations of human powers. But my concern here is with the historical dialectic one can construct in relation to those presentational strategies. Malevich did not share my theory. There is no one less likely to have accepted a rhetorical view of art than Malevich. He saw art as a compulsion, not as an invitation. Indeed, he accepted the dominant ideal of empiricist representation – that a structure of signs, properly fitted to the world – should and could compel universal assent. He differed from that tradition in where he located the compulsion. Aware of the duplicities inherent in description, Malevich turned to a neo-Kantian strategy. He would impose compulsion not by the force of resemblance but by producing literal schema that in themselves captured the essential truths of our mental powers of construction. Abstraction, then, seemed a form of compulsion deeper than any description because descriptions are only historical positivities, while abstraction captures what remains constant for everyone's mind in a variety of descriptions.

In this light, modernism is reduced to abstraction because its scepticism about the duplicity inherent in traditions of representation that could combine realistic and idealistic (or religious) elements forced it to take mental structures as the only possible ways of compelling representativeness. All other art forms were masked letters of recommendation. Yet in that very act of abstraction, modernists like Malevich enable us to recover what is perhaps the most typical classical attitude towards representation. From Aristotle's 'probable impossibles' to Reynold's 'universals', artists and theorists rarely had to grapple with the epistemological framework that equated representation with description.²¹ So they were free to understand representation as the production of possible schema for imaginative stances. But schema in a pre-Kantian universe are not candidates for expressing the essence of the mind so much as specific displays which can function to indicate typical possibilities of identification. The schema displayed in artworks function simply as rhetorical invitations. At our culture's most self-critical and reductive moment, it may have rediscovered the ideas of art as projection which sustained its most generous and capacious spiritual ideals. And if this is even half-true, there is a good deal not to despair about in the current emergence of a variety of philosophical perspectives that replace positivist ideals of compulsion by description with invitations to explore possible worlds.

* This paper was published in the *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics*, Vol. V, Nos. 1–2, 1982, pp. 1–23.

Notes and References

- ¹ Malevich, *Essay on Art*, 1915–1928, vol. 1, trans. Xenia Glowacki-Prus and Arnold McMillan (Copenhagen: Bergen 1968), pp. 123–5. For Mondrian, see “Natural Reality and Abstract Reality” in Herschel B. Chipp, ed., *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 322–3. The best work I know on how these “representations” have “content” is Leo Steinberg *Other Criteria* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 289–306 and Marcelin Pleynet, “Mondrian vingt – cinq ans apres,” in his *Système de la Peinture* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1977), pp. 133–43. And for my understanding of specific concepts related to abstraction, I am indebted to Harold Osborne, *Abstraction and Artifice* (London: Oxford University Press, 1979).
- ² In using an idea of coherence, I refer simply to an attitude we take towards a text as we attempt to integrate its salient features. We may find them incoherent or a coherent analysis of incoherence, etc. I also wish to acknowledge here that some of my terms and specific formulations derive from the following lecturers at an International Association for Philosophy and Literature Meeting on the subject of representation: Geoffrey Hartman, Linda Dittmar, William Grimes, and Gerald Bruns.
- ³ For the best summary I know of versions of realism, which also reveal the quest for grounds of resemblance, see Marshall Brown, “The Logic of Realism: A Hegelian Approach,” *PMLA* 96 (1981), pp. 224–30.
- ⁴ I hope that this one quotation from Malevich, *Essays*, vol. 2, pp. 138–9, will suffice to indicate the nature of his intentions:
 “In the case of Suprematist contrast it is the different scales of the form, i.e., the sizes (dimensions) of Suprematist Elements in their mutual interrelations that have the greatest significance. In this case color in no way corresponds to form like form to color, but it is only combined by means of the dimensions and scales of space.... The creation of these sensations may really be an expression of the essence of phenomena in the non-objective functions of the universe.”
 “This essence of phenomena is sensed non-objectively, since that is the nature of its reality. This reality will never be consciously realized, since the consciousness of form is contained in the object, in something concrete, and man strives to understand it.”
 “The world which is understood by sensation is a constant world. The world which consciousness understands as a form is not constant. Forms disappear and alter, whereas sensations neither disappear nor alter. A ball, motor, aero- plane or arrow are different forms, but the sensation of dynamism is the same.”
 “Thus, the investigation of phenomena by purely formal method brings us to forms..., but after that we must rely on sensation which should complete that which cannot be shown by the formal method
 “Only the formal approach to the universe still does allow complete: fusion between man and the universe.”
 “The formal method discovers the forms of phenomena, but not their reality or spirit.... For form, colour and spirit are phenomena with different states of energy. The total combination of their states in the universe in which my life is determined is a constant link with or in constant sensation of the spiritual aspect of the forces of the universe, both with and without image. This link in its turn calls for the activity from one which is expressed in the creation of a new phenomenon; the creation of these phenomena will depend on the quality, or capacity to conceive the image, its stableness will depend on the power of the imagination. Thanks to this striving there arises a mass of things that ought to determine my ideas.”
- ⁵ Malevich, *The World at Non-objectivity*. Unpublished writings, 1922–25, trans. Xenia Glowacki-Prus and Edmund Little (Copenhagen: Borgen, 1976), p. 16.
- ⁶ Alexander Gelley uses the idea of schema to handle specific “mimetic” representations on a level more abstract than most commentators on realism do. See his “Metonymy, Schematism, and the Space of Literature” *NLI* 13 (1980), pp. 46–88. Gelley provides a framework within which we can see non-iconic artists taking a more radical Kantian step in an already established direction of enquiry.
- ⁷ I cite from Perry’s “Perception, Action, and the Structure of Believing” forthcoming in a festschrift for Paul Grice edited by Richard Grandy and Richard Warner.
- ⁸ For Gombrich on representation, see especially “Meditation on Hobby Harse” in *Meditation on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art* (New York: Phaidon, 1967), pp. 1–11; and *Art and Illusion* (Princeton: Bollingen Press, 1960), p. 1, quote from *Art and Illusion*, pp. 38, 111. I distinguish symbolic from realistic in

accord with Gombrich's discussion of Egyptian's treating the Pharaoh's size as representing status while the Greeks read the painting as the actual story of a hero, larger than life (cf. pp. 135–6). For Gombrich's dislike of expression theories and of abstract art, see in *Meditations*, pp. 56–69, 143–150.

⁹ Maurice Denis, "Definition of Neo-Traditionism, in Chipp, ed., p. 99.

¹⁰ G. Graff, *Literature Against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), especially Chapters 1, 2, 6, 8. I analyze specific problems in his arguments – for example, what can be said to represent what in a story – in my *Act and Quality* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981), a work which also provides a general account of the rhetorical or "dramatistic" perspective I develop here and which clarifies how I use Goodman on exemplification. I should also note an increasingly popular contemporary perspective on representation as resemblance which seems to combine expressivist and descriptive categories in a way absolutely opposed to my own. From Bakhtin on the one hand, Paul de Man on the other, we find emerging a realism based on negative rather than positive categories: A "true" representation is one that shows the failure of all our interpretive categories and leaves a residue we take as full or recognizable human reality. For this applied to the drama, see Howard Felperin, *Shakespearean Representation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), and for an idealized application that makes the novel a privileged form (and reveals Felperin's bias), see Michael Holquist and Walter Reed, "Six Theses on the Novel—and Some Metaphors," *NLI-I 3* (1980), 413–24. These seem to me profoundly Pyrrhic arguments, like new critical versions of the non-discursive because they give literature a content which transcends and cancels any predications the medium might allow us to make about non-textual experience.

¹¹ Jacques Derrida, *The Truth of Painting*. Translated by Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 6.

¹² My use of ideas like "standing for" and acting for are strongly influenced by Hannah Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California, 1967) pp. 60, 92, 119, and 121.

¹³ For my purposes, it does not matter whether we ground the art function or purpose in illocutionary conventions, aesthetic attitudes, art worlds, or authorial intentions. And I claim adequacy only within traditions that grant some distinctive attitude to how we examine an aesthetic object as a significant particular. These are compatible with a wide variety of theories on how we use what is so constituted.

¹⁴ For an analytical account of artworks as not bound by Kripke's causal view of names and hence as providing a range of imaginative identities, see Mary Bittner Wiseman, "Identifying Subjects," forthcoming in *American Philosophical Review*. And for a radical literary account of Romanticism as the projection of possibilities rather than description, see Donald Pease, "Blake, Crane, Whitman and Modernism: A Poetics of Pure Possibility" *PMLA*, 96 (1981), 64–85.

¹⁵ Wallace Stevens, *The Necessary Angel* (New York: Vintage, 1965), pp. 123–4.

¹⁶ My alternative is a pluralism of means that I do not think necessarily entails an individual supporting a pluralism of ends. See on this subject my essay "Taking Ends Seriously: Criteria for Discussing the Purposes of Literary Criticism".

¹⁷ This, I realize now, is what Wittgenstein means by displaying one's critical grasp of a work by performing it or showing someone how to go on with it. See his *Lecture and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, ed. Cyril Barrett (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966). And for an attempt to generalize this criterion of going on, which I now see (from Henry Staten) misses the radical nature of Wittgenstein's questions but works for practical cases, see my "Going on and Going Nowhere: Wittgenstein and the Question of Criteria in Literary Criticism," in William Cain, ed., *Literature and Philosophy*.

¹⁸ For a good summary of the arguments against using ideas of menial representation in epistemology, see Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), Chapters 1–3.

¹⁹ Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations*, p. 34.

²⁰ Stanley Cavell, *The Claims of Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), Parts 1 and 4.

²¹ W. J. T. Mitchell makes a similar point about the change in the status of image from being largely verbal to being largely pictorial once empiricism takes hold. His essay, "What Is an Image" overlaps with mine, I think, in several supportive ways.

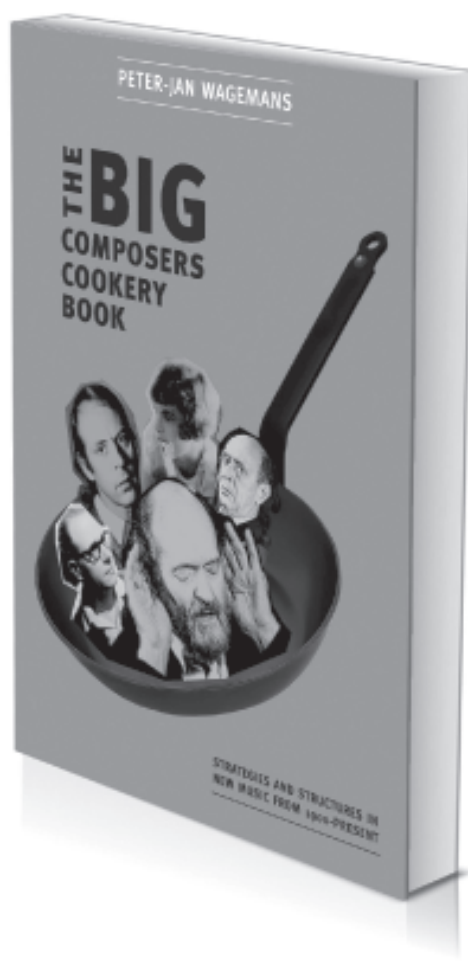
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